

SACE TWO
**ENGLISH
LITERARY
STUDIES**

CRITICAL READING
WORKBOOK
SECOND EDITION

SHANE CRILLY



ADELAIDE
TUITION
CENTRE

THE AUTHOR

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance in completing this book:

- Alison Robertson, for her encouraging comments and wise advice.
- Mark Eather, who was there at the start, for his practical advice and helpful suggestions.
- Melanie Smith and Cass Harrison, for their feedback and willingness to trial the booklet within their classes.
- Henry Jones, for his valuable 'second opinions'.

PUBLISHING INFORMATION

This workbook is part of the Essentials series, designed to support the teaching of SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in South Australia. It is designed to meet the requirements of the South Australian SACE Stage 2 English Literary Studies course.

The Essentials Education series is published by

Adelaide Tuition Centre,

21 Fourth Street, Bowden 5007.

TELEPHONE (08) 8241 5568

FACSIMILE (08) 8241 5597

www.essentialseducation.com.au

LIBRARY CATALOGUE:

Crilly, S.

1. English Literary Studies 2. **Essentials Workbook**

ISBN 978-1-925505-28-3

First edition 2017. This second edition 2019.

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SECTION

1

Basic requirements of the Critical Reading component

For this part of the course you will be required to answer usually three or more questions in the exam based on your close and critical reading of one or more unseen short texts. You will have 1½ hours to do this.

These texts could include newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements, web pages, blogs, short stories, poetry, travel writing, play scripts, cartoons and obituaries. So, expect the unexpected!

In the exam there will be questions that test your knowledge of **what** the author is saying. This is straightforward comprehension and most students have little trouble with this.

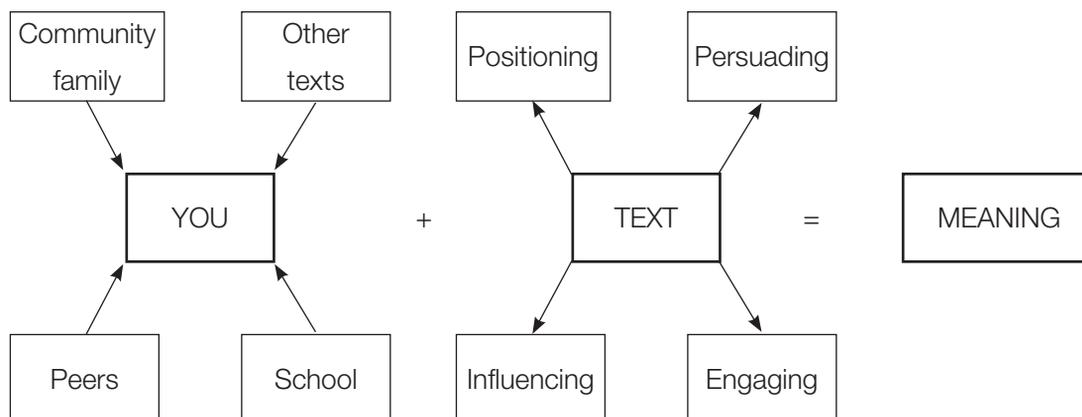
However, you will also be asked questions that relate to **context**. This means that you will need to consider **how** the texts function, by examining the way they are put together and the effect this has on the reader. This is the focus of this booklet.

Understanding the ‘**how**’ as opposed to ‘**what**’ can be very difficult.

- It involves explaining the way authors use language and visual elements to direct your understanding of the content of the text towards their point of view or perspective of the world.
- It involves recognising how your own assumptions, beliefs and experiences as a reader and member of a particular culture influence your understanding of the text.

This can be represented by the following diagram.

Society



In short, you must step back and analyse the whole process of reading a particular text at a particular time. This is what is meant by context.

Students who can write effectively about this process are rewarded by the examiners.

Examiners always say that this is what separates the good students from the ordinary students.

But before you can begin to analyse context you need to know what you are up against. You need to know the nature of the beast.

IMPORTANT

While you might be tempted to bypass the hard work of writing answers for the exercises in this book, be aware that you are passing up a good opportunity to prepare yourself for the exam.

The exam at the end of the year ultimately assesses your ability to write.

Time spent practising how to write is essential preparation for the English Literary Studies exam.

SECTION

2

The nature of the beast

Imagine that you are studying to be a vet. You have attended all the lectures and read all the books, but the first day that you go out on the job to help deliver a calf you get kicked by the frightened cow because you weren't paying attention.

Doing the Critical Reading section in the exam at the end of the year is a bit like this. You must be prepared (for example, knowing the main techniques that writers use), but every text has its own temperament. Be wary of this and give each text close attention, otherwise you might be thrown off guard.

Therefore, we're going to begin by encountering the beast face to face. If I showed you a snake and asked you to study it, you would be very focused. **Hands-on experience is the best teacher.** This is your first and most important lesson.

The more beasts you encounter, the more confident you will feel and the more prepared you will be for the exam. You want to approach the exam with the same amount of confidence as Bear Grylls has approaching the beasts he encounters.



SECTION

3

Confronting the beast

Let's begin with a little beast written by a travel writer, Tony Horwitz. This is an excerpt from his book, 'One for the Road: An Outback Adventure'. Read it through and try to figure what it is on about, or what point it is making. In other words, what is the nature of the beast?

For several thousand miles, I've been struggling for un-superlatives to communicate the un-ness of outback scenery. The towns and people are easy enough; they have faces, buildings, features. But what can you say about a landscape that is utterly featureless? A landscape whose most distinguishing quality is that it has no distinguishing qualities whatsoever? Flat, bare, dry. Bleak, empty, arid. Barren, wretched, bleached. You can reshuffle the adjectives but the total is still the sum of its parts. And the total is zero. Zot. Nought. Ayers Rock has a lot of blank space to answer for.

To the early explorers, this arid region north of Adelaide was simply Australia's 'Ghastly Blank'. Charles Sturt set off into the desert east of here in 1844 to find the inland sea, and so sure was he of success that his party included two sailors and a boat (as well as eleven horses, two hundred sheep, thirty bullocks and four drays). 'I shall envy that man who shall first place the flag of our native country in the centre of our adopted land,' he declared. But after staggering for some months through the desert, Sturt reached neither sea nor centre – just the dry expanse of Lake Torrens. 'The desolate barrenness, the dreary monotony, the denuded aspect of this spot is beyond description,' he wrote in his journal, having described it rather well. Daniel Brock, a member of Sturt's party added, 'This scene is the Climax of Desolation...Miserable! Horrible!' Not long after, Sturt launched his boat on the Darling River and then retreated to Adelaide.

Looking out the back of the ute I am amazed that Sturt made it as far as he did. Desert to the right of me, desert to the left of me, a plume of car dust shooting down the middle, I claim this spot as the landing pad for the alien probe I imagined my first day in Australia. The alien probe that drops down, declares 'No life', and heads back to outer space. The probe people could sniff around here for a few hundred miles in every direction and come to the same conclusion. No life. No bloody way.

Appeal to reason

Horwitz is trying to convince us that the outback is not a desirable tourist destination. He does this mainly through argument. With the **evidence** he provides, he tries to persuade us to accept his point of view.

What evidence does he provide? List examples here.

.. .. .

Did you notice first-hand observation and the quotations from famous explorers?

He also poses a **question**, which engages the reader. Find it and recall your response.

When asked a question it is polite to answer, even though in this case the question does not need one because it is self-evident. We call this a **rhetorical question**.

Finally, Horwitz uses **repetition** to emphasise the monotony of the landscape.

Where are the examples of repetition? Write some here.

.. .. .

Did you notice the repetition of the sentence structures ('Flat, bare, dry. Bleak, empty, arid. Barren, wretched, bleached') and phrase structures ('Desert to the right of me, desert to the left of me')?

Providing evidence, posing questions and strategically repeating key words and phrases are the principal devices of presenting a logical argument to the reader.

Note: If writers can mount a logical argument, it is hard to dispute what they say. Logic seems to stand alone, outside of language. This is because of a basic reasoning: if the universe seems to obey the logic of the laws of physics, by association, it follows that logic is universal. We forget, though, that we need to use language to construct our logic.

How does appeal to reason persuade the reader?

Evidence: When writers provide evidence (facts, statistics, examples and quotations), their arguments seem more authoritative, especially when these support what the writers say (as is the case with Horwitz). We are reassured that writers have done the necessary research, which makes us more willing to accept their point of view.

Questions provoke a response in readers and stimulate their thinking. There are two main types of questions: reflective/investigative questions and rhetorical questions.

- **Reflective/investigative questions** are designed to stimulate the reader's thinking on the topic without necessarily expecting the reader to know the answer, e.g. Why and how and when did human beings start using those sounds which we call human language?
- **Rhetorical questions** do not require finding an answer because the answer is self-evident. When your parents say to you, 'How many times do I have to tell you to clean up your room?' they are not anticipating that you will answer them with a number. Writers use rhetorical questions for effect, as a means of summing up or emphasising their point. If they pose a question that suggests only one answer in the reader's mind then they have clinched their argument, e.g. But what can you say about a landscape that is utterly featureless?

Repetition can be an important strategy in summarising or reinforcing key points or ideas. The constant return to a phrase, statistic or fact makes any argument sound strong and firm, giving the impression that it is permanent or universal and, therefore, worthy of acceptance.

Balance: Finally, many writers include opposing arguments, which they set about discrediting. Not only does this make their argument look stronger, but it also makes writers appear reasonable, which persuades the reader to accept their point of view. This is called **balanced argument** and will be discussed in more detail below.

Appeal to emotions

Horwitz mainly appeals to our sense of reason, but he also appeals to our emotions. Quite apart from what he says, you might have been struck by the **tone** of his 'voice'. He sounds flabbergasted and resorts to being flippant and mischievous as a way of coming to terms with what he witnessed.

In oral language, tone is mainly conveyed through voice inflection, which reflects the feeling of the speaker. However, in written language, this tone must be conveyed mainly through word choice. Either way, tone of voice can have an emotional effect on the reader (just as you might get upset when someone speaks to you in a sarcastic manner).

While tone results from the cumulative effect of word choice, certain words, phrases and sentences have the power to stir emotions when they suggest a vivid picture in the readers' minds. This is called **imagery**. You may have noticed that Horwitz uses imagery to enlist support for his point of view when he skilfully reconstructs the stark image of the outback that he witnessed ('flat', 'arid' and 'barren'). This, no doubt, would amaze the reader as much as it did Horwitz. Moreover, the starkness of the outback that Horwitz observes is reinforced by the humorous reference to the alien probe, which triggers associations with the barren landscape beamed back from planets such as Mars.

While Horwitz does not like what he sees, he dismisses the landscape in a light-hearted way, as I have indicated. This is signalled in the opening sentence where he begins his description with a negative: 'I've been struggling for un-superlatives to communicate the un-ness of the outback.' Starting with a non-description is **unexpected** and no doubt would amuse some readers.

He then uses **exaggeration** to enhance the light-hearted tone of this extract. He ‘reshuffles’ adjectives such as ‘bare’, ‘empty’ and ‘barren’ repetitively to emphasise the impression the landscape made on him. Moreover, to suggest that aliens would be scared away by the outback (‘No bloody way’) is somewhat **incongruous** (ridiculous) and prompts humour.

The unexpected (‘un-superlatives’), exaggeration (in the adjectives) and the incongruous (something ridiculous or silly) are all aspects of **humour**. While there are no belly laughs, the reader is at least amused, which is an emotional response.

How does an appeal to the emotions persuade the reader?

One of the best ways to get readers onside is to provoke some sort of physical or emotional response. When readers are moved in some way by the text – tears, laughter, empathy – they feel more personally involved with the subject material. The more personally involved readers become, the more attentive they are. Readers, therefore, are more likely to respond favourably to the writer’s point of view.

Tone is a word used to describe how a text ‘sounds’ and results mainly from the sum effect of word choice (**vocabulary**) in the written component of texts. Punctuation and sentence structure, however, also contribute to the tone of texts (for example, lots of dashes or full stops can suggest abruptness). In the visual components of texts, the choice of colour, pictures and graphics all contribute to the overall tone (refer to section on visual elements).

Readers will often respond emotionally to the tone of a text. We can say that the tone creates a **mood** within readers, which influences how they will relate to the content.

Some **words that describe tone** include:

confident, authoritative, aggressive, angry, contemptuous, serious, controlled, reasonable, indifferent, cold, passionate, critical, sad, depressive, regretful, humorous, comical, ironic and sarcastic.

Supplement this or compile your own list.

Imagery often functions to provoke an emotional response in the reader, especially when it is vivid. A skilful writer can stimulate our senses so that we can almost touch, see, hear, taste and smell what is being described. With our attention captivated, we become less guarded and more open to accept the writer’s point of view.

Humour is entertaining and evokes a positive response in the reader. It also produces consensus or general agreement. If everyone laughs together, they are all thinking the same thing. Humour relies mainly on **exaggeration**, the **unexpected** and the **incongruous**.

Additionally, writers may provide readers with some sort of concrete example (**analogy**) to demonstrate the point they are making. This often provokes emotional responses in the readers, which assists them in understanding the abstract ideas the writer presents. My analogy of the veterinary student could provoke apprehension, which might make my readers more attentive to the point I am making. Analogy is discussed in more detail further on.

SECTION

4

A slightly bigger beast

Read the 'Rights for the mites' article (on the following page), written by Catharine Lumby.

Analogy

Writers will often provide an **analogy**, a moving **anecdote** (brief story) or **emotive example**, to reach the reader's feelings and help them understand, or identify with, what they are saying. A similarity is established between something recognisable, the analogy, and the abstract ideas or concepts the writer is trying to put across, making them more accessible.

If readers can relate to the concrete, then, chances are they can relate to the abstract. The analogy often proves to be more memorable or effective than the ideas, concepts or arguments that the writer presents.

Lumby does this at the beginning of her text. She arrests our attention with the 'unthinkable' scenario of a husband physically abusing his wife because she does not respond to his commands. While this might provoke humour, because it is so incongruous (ridiculous), it could also provoke horror and disgust in the reader who cares to imagine it in detail.

Once Lumby has aroused these emotions, they linger on as the reader finishes the article. They are ready to draw upon to enlist the reader's sympathy for the subject of her text: children in our society.

This sympathy is also reinforced through her choice of words. (Note as you are reading how the 'humour' and the choice of words contribute to the overall confrontational tone of her article.)



First Person

Catharine Lumby

Rights for the mites

What's our excuse for sanctioning physical assaults on the physically and politically least powerful members of our community?

Imagine the following scenario. The setting is a middle-class dinner party and it's getting late. Coffee has been served and only the hosts and two couples are left.

The women have got locked into a conversation but the husband of one is anxious to go. He reminds his wife that he has an early golf game the next day. He collects his coat and repeats himself. Finally, he jerks her up from the dinner table by one arm and strikes her sharply on the back of one leg.

'I asked you once politely,' he tells her in front of her friends. 'I asked you twice but you wouldn't listen. Now I'm telling you – we have to go.'

A scene which is completely unthinkable when played out between adults can be witnessed routinely between parents and children any day of the week.

Head down a supermarket aisle and chances are you'll see someone threatening to smack their kid. Sit in an airport lounge and you'll see children dragged around like rag dolls. Go to most playgrounds and you'll find someone screaming abuse at a little one.

Not all parents think it's OK to take a swipe at their offspring, to jerk them around like puppets, or to humiliate them in public.

Every parent knows how taxing young children can be. Parents get tired of repeating themselves, they get sick of walking across the room and removing their child from danger, they find it hard to keep their temper after starting the day at 5am with a hyperactive toddler.

There are plenty of excuses for lashing out at children. But there's really only one reason people still feel free to do it: we still regard children as property.

Today men who hit their wives are regarded as criminals. Yet weirdly, we continue to sanction exactly the same methods of 'correction' for the most vulnerable members of society: our children.

This bizarre social paradox was illustrated recently when the NSW government endorsed legislation which stops parents and carers who are charged with assaulting children relying on the defence of 'lawful correction'. But it stops far short of banning smacking or hitting children with belts, sticks, spoons and other weapons.

The Attorney-General even felt obliged to reassure the community that the parliament was not 'stepping into the family home'. But why on earth not when we don't condone physical punishment of any other member of society?

Noted historian of childhood, Philippe Aries tells us that the rise of corporal punishment of children was a hallmark of the rise of an authoritarian and hierarchical approach to managing the young. It was the beginning of a long history of humiliating children and inflicting pain on them under the guise of tutoring and caring for them.

Children are the only people left in society who others can lawfully hit. They are also the group with the least power, having few legal rights and no way of representing themselves in collective terms.

You have to wonder what future societies will make of these glaring anomalies in liberal democracy. What's our excuse for sanctioning physical assaults on the physically and politically least powerful members of our community?

Tradition? Religious superstition about children needing the devil beaten out of them? Fear we won't be able to bend children to our will without the threat of violence? Any way you cut it, the excuses are wearing thin.

The Bulletin

Connotative words

Look closely at this part.

Head down a supermarket aisle and chances are you'll see someone threatening to smack their kid. Sit in an airport lounge and you'll see children dragged around like rag dolls. Go to most playgrounds and you'll find someone screaming abuse at a little one.

Not all parents think it's OK to take a swipe at their offspring, to jerk them around like puppets or to humiliate them in public.

Which words stand out? Circle them.

Hint: Which words are not being used literally?

Did you notice 'rag dolls' and 'puppets'?

Write down the associations you make with these words.

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-
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What do these associations have in common?

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-
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Rag dolls and puppets are things that you control and own. They are objects that can be used and discarded at will. As inanimate objects, they are not treated like they have any feelings. They can be dropped, thrown, dragged and struck without any remorse.

When we substitute the associations that rag dolls and puppets suggest with the word 'children' (a child = a rag doll/puppet), it is easy to be appalled at the way children are treated in society. Rag dolls and puppets therefore are very emotive and suggestive. Words like this are called **connotative words**.

But note that this is Lumby's point of view; it is the way she sees children being treated. Her choice of key words has positioned us in a very particular way. Our sympathies are clearly being directed towards the children and against the parents.

How do connotative words shape a response in the reader?

One way of looking at the author's craft is as a process of choosing words and organising them in a particular order. Words are the building blocks of language – therefore, word choice is often a good place to start your investigation of the writer's techniques.

Some words, however, stand out more than others because they are more suggestive. Words that suggest more than they literally mean are called connotative words. When a word is used out of its usual context there is a transfer of meaning to the new context. For example, when the US military says it performed a 'surgical strike', the medical meaning (having an operation to make you better) is imported into the context of war, positioning the reader to see bombing as something positive.

Analysing connotative words can lead to effective discussions about tone, mood, style, imagery, allusion, symbolism and point of view. They are also a key into the cultural assumptions we all share.

Note that, like the previous passage, Lumby also appeals to her reader on a rational level. She provides evidence (relying on authorities such as the NSW government legislation, the Attorney-General and a 'noted historian') and asks reflective questions.

She also attempts to be balanced, which gives the reader the impression that she is being reasonable, especially after her emotive introduction. In the seventh paragraph she shows understanding for the opposing argument when she points out: 'And every parent knows how taxing young children can be'. Nevertheless, she is quick to discredit the reasons parents use to hit their children: 'But there is really only one reason people feel free to do it: we still regard children as property.'

Summary

Reason and emotions are the fundamental ways of appealing to the reader.

Rational appeal typically relies on the following to be most effective:

- evidence (quotations, examples, statistics)
- questions (reflective/investigative and rhetorical)
- balance (considering both sides of argument)
- repetition (summary and reinforcement).

Emotional appeal often relies on:

- tone (how the text 'sounds' – word choice)
- imagery (mental pictures made from words)
- humour (exaggeration, unexpected and the incongruous)
- analogy (anecdote and emotive examples)
- connotative words (positioning the reader).

Depending on the subject material and point of view, one way usually works better than the other. Most writers, such as Horwitz, Lumby and the writer of the following article, however, use a blend.

SECTION

5

With this one you'll soon be taming lions

Read the 'Map of the human art' article carefully (on the following page) and try to get the gist of what the author is saying.

Record what you observed in this article.

Tip: Always take notes or underline or circle anything you notice when you read.

What are your impressions? How would you describe the tone of this article?

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In one or two sentences explain what the author is saying. What is his attitude to technology?

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.. .. .

Did you find yourself agreeing, accepting or sympathising with the author's point of view?

How much of this can be attributed to the way the article was written?

Let's have a closer look at how Beale attempts to persuade the reader to share his point of view.

Map of the human art

tech watch

*Our technology is becoming increasingly ambitious and a lot smarter. But, says **Bob Beale**, the real question is how we harness this power for the good of humanity.*

As the interplay between life and technology grows more complex and subtle, so does our collective discomfort about the apparent blurring of the boundary between the two.

Consider this recent example: Israeli scientists have designed a biochemical computer – made of and fuelled by DNA – so small that three trillion of them would fit into a tiny droplet. The very idea of using genetic material as software may seem, well, creepy and unnatural. But it merely enlists processes that already exist in profusion: the biomolecular ‘machines’ within every living cell and the capacity of genes to store great gobs of information in a miserly space – a single gram of dried DNA can store about as much as a trillion compact discs.

One of the creators of this extraordinary device, Professor Eud Shapiro, believes it will be possible one day to inject such nanocomputers into the human body to sense, identify and even correct malfunctions at a cellular level. But it’s not hard to imagine as well that in the wrong hands such a technology could be wielded in abhorrent ways.

The point is not that DNA computers are inherently dangerous. They’re not. It’s just that we have already invented them but with no real way of knowing what they might be capable of.

We can already implant much larger machines into our bodies, such as the pacemakers that regulate heartbeat. We can clone a complete cow or take a single gene from a virus and insert it into a plant: we can identify one man from a million others by scanning his eyeball.

We have also created virtual places where virtual communities have quickly thrived and we have taught a monkey to remotely move a cursor on a screen by power of its thought alone. The reach of our senses now extends from being able to ‘hear’ an electron change orbit inside an atom to being able to ‘see’ into the outer reaches of the universe. And there’s the rub: we’re entering totally uncharted territory, places where the map of the human experience ends abruptly.

We may well be the most remarkable fruit of nature’s four-billion-year research and development program but our capacity for innovation is taking us beyond frontiers we didn’t even know existed just one lifetime ago. Are we simply becoming novelty junkies blinkered to the

yawning gap between rich and poor, or deaf to the environmental alarm bells we have set ringing across the planet?

If you feel nervous about all this and have the uneasy feeling that we’re flying blind into the future, don’t worry: you’re not alone. It’s not simply the nature of all these changes that confronts and unsettles us but the sheer staggering pace of the process itself.

In his thoughtful book, *The Spike*, author Damien Broderick peers ahead into humanity’s accelerating ride ‘into the unimaginable future’. Broderick says ‘we can confidently expect that some form of intelligence (human, silicon, or a blend of the two) will emerge at a post-human level. At that point, all the standard rules and cultural projections go into the wastepaper basket.’

By 2020, desktop computers will exceed the memory capacity and computing speed of the human brain, according to US technology guru Ray Kurzweil. By mid-century, he believes, a single computer will have a processing power equivalent to all human brains. And it doesn’t really matter whether such a computer is biochemical, silicon or carbon-based.

The real question is whether we will be ready and able to cope with computers that convincingly claim to be sentient beings, that demand the right to vote and that come up with answers to questions we didn’t even ask. It’s hard enough to envisage machines that can think, harder still to know what might come of neural implants that could tap our brains directly into computers or plumb one human brain into another.

‘By 2030, instead of just phoning a friend, you will be able to meet in, say, a Mozambian game reserve that will seem compellingly real,’ Kurzweil has suggested. ‘You will be able to have any type of experience – business, social, sexual – with anyone, real or simulated, regardless of physical proximity.’

Here’s hoping that we slow down a little and prove to be as humane and ecologically aware as we are smart. If we use our awesome inventive powers for talking fridges, vile weapons or cheap thrills and not to fight the scourges of environmental degradation, poverty and disease – well, that would be truly scary.

The Bulletin

Developing your powers of observation

This is the second most important lesson. The more you notice, the better chance you have of answering the questions successfully.

Write down anything you can recall without referring back to the text.

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What thinking did these things trigger?

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What do you think caused you to remember these things?

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On the following page is an example of what you might have noticed.

Map of the human art

wordplay in title
(allusion to Shakespeare)

signals regular column

tech watch

*Our technology is becoming increasingly ambitious and a lot smarter. But, says **Bob Beale**, the real question is how we harness this power for the good of humanity.*

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The point is not that DNA computers are inherently dangerous. They’re not. It’s just that we have already invented them but with no real way of knowing what they might be capable of.

We can already implant much larger machines into our bodies, such as the pacemakers that regulate heartbeat. We can clone a complete cow or take a single gene from a virus and insert it into a plant: we can identify one man from a million others by scanning his eyeball.

We have also created virtual places where **virtual communities** have quickly thrived and we have taught a monkey to remotely move a cursor on a screen by power of its thought alone. The reach of our senses now extends from being able to ‘hear’ an electron change orbit inside an atom to being able to ‘see’ into the outer reaches of the universe. And there’s the **rub**: we’re entering **totally uncharted territory**, places where the map of the human experience ends abruptly.

We may well be the most remarkable **fruit** of nature’s four-billion-year research and development program but our capacity for innovation is taking us beyond **frontiers** we didn’t even know existed just one lifetime ago. Are we simply becoming novelty junkies blinkered to the

yawning gap between rich and poor, or deaf to the environmental alarm bells **we** have set ringing across the planet?

If **you** feel nervous about all this and have the uneasy feeling that **we’re** flying blind into the future, **don’t** worry: **you’re** not alone. It’s not simply the nature of all these changes that confronts and unsettles us but the sheer staggering pace of the process itself.

In his thoughtful book, *The Spike*, author Damien Broderick peers ahead into humanity’s accelerating ride **‘into the unimaginable future’**. Broderick says ‘we can confidently expect that some form of intelligence (human, silicon, or a blend of the two) will emerge at a post-human level. At that point, all the standard rules and cultural projections go into the wastepaper basket.’

By 2020, desktop computers will exceed the memory capacity and computing speed of the human brain, according to US technology **guru** Ray Kurzweil. By mid-century, he believes, a single computer will have a processing power equivalent to all human brains. And it doesn’t really matter whether such a computer is biochemical, silicon or carbon-based.

The real question is whether we will be ready and able to cope with computers that convincingly claim to be sentient beings, that demand the right to vote and that come up with answers to questions we didn’t even ask. It’s hard enough to envisage machines that can think, harder still to know what might come of neural implants that could tap our brains directly into computers or plumb one human brain into another.

‘By 2030, instead of just phoning a friend, you will be able to meet in, say, a Mozambian game reserve that will seem compellingly real,’ Kurzweil has suggested. ‘You will be able to have any type of experience – business, social, sexual – with anyone, real or simulated, regardless of physical proximity.’

Here’s hoping that we slow down a little and prove to be as humane and ecologically aware as we are smart. If we use our awesome inventive powers for talking fridges, vile weapons or cheap thrills and not to fight the scourges of environmental degradation, poverty and disease – well, that would be truly scary.

The Bulletin, Tuesday 25 March 2003

example

colloquial words

balance
(considers both sides of argument)

formal/
technical words

figurative language

inclusive pronouns

contractions

direct address

question

connotative word

quotations

Context

The text comes from a column ('tech watch') in a magazine called *The Bulletin*. This magazine targets business, professional or corporate readers and is designed to inform. What this tells us is that the author must assume a certain type of reader (the **implied reader**) when he writes. This will influence the way the text is written.

Tip: Take time to read different types of newspapers (e.g. *The Australian*) for more examples of articles. Refer to page 41 for a summary of the features of magazine and newspaper articles.

In line with the targeted readership, Beale relies heavily on **reason** to convince his readers. He develops a logical, coherent argument and provides readers with ample **evidence**.

List examples of the following:

Quotations:

-
-
-

Examples:

-
-
-

Facts:

-
-
-

Statistics:

-
-
-

Aside from the content you may have noticed Beale's anxious tone. Beale is concerned about the rapid pace of technological change and he is appealing to his readers to be careful. He wants them to resist being 'novelty junkies' and to put technology to good use, such as tackling the 'scourges of environmental degradation and disease'.

Beale is not against technology; he just wants us to have **balance**. He demonstrates this balance in the way he writes. In the third paragraph, he details how 'nanocomputers' can improve our health but warns that such technology can 'be wielded in abhorrent ways'.

Why is context important?

Form: Text types appear in many different contexts (newspapers, books, magazines, internet, billboards). A particular text type can appear in a variety of contexts for different types of audiences. For example, a short story can appear in a children's book, a literary journal or a women's magazine. Also, within each context there can be many text types: articles, advertisements, stories, etc.

A distinction can also be made in the newspaper context between **broadsheet** and **tabloid** newspapers.

Broadsheets like *The Australian*:

- require a higher level of knowledge, education and literacy
- focus on issues of national interest (e.g. politics and business).

Tabloids like *The Advertiser*:

- are less challenging and require only a minimal level of knowledge and literacy
- have a tendency to dramatise issues with large headlines and big pictures
- concentrate on less serious topics (e.g. a dog saved from a well)
- have more focus on personal and private issues (e.g. reports that feature families affected by the government budget).

Purpose: Texts generally have three main purposes: they are designed to sell, inform or entertain. Within these three main categories numerous other reasons why authors construct texts can be discerned. Authors may intend to horrify, persuade or incite their readers to action, as in the case of Bob Beale (refer especially to the last paragraph).

However, when discussing purpose, stick to the obvious indicators – sell, inform, entertain – that the context indicates. Do not waste any time on the author's personal intentions, unless they explicitly state them. We can never truly know why an author constructs a particular text.

Audience: Context, form and purpose will determine the audience to a large degree. A PC user (audience) who needs to update her equipment might buy a PC magazine (context) and read an article (form) about the do's and don'ts of buying (purpose).

Hence, while we can identify certain text types, such as articles and advertisements, their meaning and function can only be understood in relation to the four points (audience, context, form, purpose) just mentioned.

Style

Observe how the vocabulary in Beale's article is quite sophisticated. There are many technical terms ('virtual communities' and 'nanocomputers') and lofty words ('interplay' and 'sentient'), which we associate with formal written language. (Do you talk to your friends like this?)

Can you find any others? List them.

.. .. .

Note also, however, that in addition to these words, there are words and phrases that we normally associate with informal, conversational language or everyday speech (e.g. 'creepy', 'great gobs', 'there's the rub' and 'cheap thrills').

Can you find any others? List them.

.. .. .

The author also uses lots of **contractions** ('don't' instead of 'do not', and 'we're' instead of 'we are'), which imitate the way we would speak the language instead of writing it.¹

Can you find any others? List them.

.. .. .

The collective effect of Beale's use of contractions and **colloquial** words (slang or informal words) is to create a conversational style.

Style relates to the type of text a piece of writing most closely resembles (in this case, a conversation). **Words that we can use to describe the way a text is written include: journalistic, academic, technical, legalistic, conversational, and so forth.**

The combination of formal and informal language gives the impression that Beale is having a conversation with an intelligent, like-minded and informed person – his reader. Most people like to be regarded in this manner, so this is an effective style to use.

How does style influence the reader?

When writers adopt a **conversational style** and use everyday language conventions (colloquial words, contractions) readers often feel more comfortable. We tend to trust someone who speaks like us.

Alternatively, when writers are more **formal** (i.e. they use more academic or scientific words and avoid colloquial words and contractions) we tend to take the content of the text more seriously and view it more objectively.

Style is defined in a similar way to tone (cumulative effect of words and stylistic features), but the collective effect in this case helps orientate the reader to the text type the author is using. Usually there are other indicators to tell you this (column insignia or source identification) but like the blending of emotional and rational appeals, writers sometimes blend their styles. For example, a short story might be written in a journalistic style but still remind you of a fairy tale or children's story (see the discussion later on Mia Couto's 'The Day Mabata-bata Exploded').

¹ Observe how I use contractions throughout this book in order to maintain a conversational tone in my writing.

Reader address

The relaxed, intelligent, conversational style Beale is trying to create is helped along by the way the reader is addressed. While Beale mostly uses the **objective voice** (he doesn't use 'I') he refers directly to the reader ('if **you** feel nervous...**you're** not alone') and also uses inclusive pronouns ('we', 'our'). **Direct address** and **inclusive pronouns** give us vital clues about context: they are the main indicators of the assumptions that both the writer and the reader share.

How does mode of address persuade the reader?

Objective voice: When the voice speaking to you does not refer to itself with a personal pronoun ('I' or 'we') we say that it is in the objective voice.

The absence of 'I' or 'we' suggests that the author's point of view is (presumably) not influenced by personal opinion. Instead readers are led to believe that what they are reading is impartial truth, fact or reality. The objective voice is often associated with authority, like the unidentified voices heard in documentaries.

Personal voice: When writers use the pronouns 'I', 'we', or 'you' we say that they are using the personal voice (first person).

I: When writers use 'I' they take readers into their confidence, which builds trust and establishes a more personal relationship with them – for example, 'I've been struggling for un-superlatives to communicate the un-ness of outback scenery' OR 'I am amazed that Sturt made it as far as he did'.

We, us and our: These are **inclusive pronouns** and are used when writers appeal to our common sense or make a claim to speak for the majority – for example, 'We still regard children as property' OR 'As the interplay between life and technology grows... so does our collective discomfort'. This establishes a link with the reader.

When writers use **inclusive pronouns** they are assuming that we share their point of view. If we go along with this, we're more likely to accept whatever they say. Inclusive pronouns have the same power as peer group pressure when we imagine many others sharing the same view as the writer.

Inclusive pronouns also function to make readers more accountable by implicating them in the issues that the author raises. However, we must always remember that the use of inclusive pronouns reveals that the writer is constructing an imagined community of shared beliefs.

You: When a writer uses this pronoun we call it **direct address**. Direct address is a more intimate way of communicating with readers. Readers feel they are being singled out and sense they have a more personal relationship with the author. Like the inclusive pronoun, direct address makes it difficult for the reader to be distant and therefore encourages accountability. We are directed to respond either positively or negatively to the situation/issue/character – for example, 'If you feel nervous about all this... you're not alone!'.

Note: Pronouns can assist discussion of **tone**. Whenever a writer attempts to relate more personally to the reader we can say that he or she is adopting an intimate or confidential tone.

Advanced tips:

- First-person voice, inclusive pronouns and direct address often go together when a writer makes a personal appeal to the reader. Refer to 'Map of the human art' and 'Rights for the mites'.
- Many texts use a blend of the personal and objective voices. Usually they are setting up an objective point of view, which they support with some personal opinion.
- Be careful with the pronoun 'you', as it is sometimes used in the sense of the objective 'one'. For example, the 'you' in '**You** have to wonder what future societies will make of these glaring anomalies in liberal democracy' ('Rights for the mites') is not addressing the reader directly because the author is referring to the whole of society, in the sense of '**one** has to wonder'.

Wordplay

Most titles (and headings and subheadings) are designed to get your attention. Often they display a creative use of words. This might involve:

- **pun** (a play on words)
- **alliteration** (words close by that start with the same consonant)
- **rhyme**.

Beale's title is no exception. It makes reference to a quotation from Shakespeare – 'map of the human heart' (which is also the title of a film) – but Beale has managed to change the last word ('art') to make it fit the meaning of his article. When authors make an indirect or passing reference with a word or phrase to other people, texts (the Bible being a prime example), stories, myths, and historical events, we call this **allusion**. If authors can establish a connection with anything that is well known, then their view on the subject of the text is likely to be strengthened or fortified.

How does wordplay and allusion influence the reader?

Any creative use of words will attract the reader's attention, especially if it is linked to something familiar or topical that the reader can identify with. This happens all the time in newspapers (e.g. Power Failure at the MCG). The place where this mostly occurs is in titles and subheadings. We often appreciate clever or amusing wordplay.

A connection can usually be made between **wordplay** and the author's point of view. For example, Beale uses the image of a map ('map of the human art') to help the reader understand what he is talking about. He says half way through: 'we're entering totally uncharted territory, places where the map of human experience ends abruptly.' We are reminded here of the early explorers who ventured out into uncharted waters only to end up lost or shipwrecked. This helps reinforce the dangers that he is warning us of.

More importantly, the **allusion** to Shakespeare in the title assumes that readers – professional, academic and business people – are familiar with the quotation. If authors can establish a connection with anything that is known to the reader, then their point of view is likely to be strengthened. Like direct address and inclusive pronouns, this places writer and reader within a given context.

Wordplay typically involves devices such as **alliteration** and **rhyme**, which attract our attention and trigger a number of coinciding meanings.

Figurative language

When writers are not being literal, we say that they are being 'figurative'. Beale does not literally mean that we all have an incomplete map in our hands, which we are using to navigate our way into the future. It's just an image he wants us to have in our mind, to help us relate to his point of view. Writers mainly use metaphors and similes to build imagery. Metaphor and simile are the main figures of speech.

What are metaphors and similes?

In metaphor, one word is used instead of another to suggest a similarity between things and to create a more interesting effect. For example, instead of saying 'the pianist's fingers moved up and down the keyboard', I could say that they 'danced up and down the keyboard'. Dancing is a particular type of movement. When readers make the association between fingers and dancers a more vivid image is created in their mind.

Beale is being metaphoric when he says that 'we're entering totally uncharted territory'. This is called a spatial metaphor.

In simile this likeness is stated, through the use of the words 'like' or 'as', rather than implied. I could have said, 'the fingers moved up and down the keyboard like they were dancing'.

Metaphor is more direct, but simile is no less effective. Both express an exact shade of meaning, by providing the reader with an image they can relate to.

Summary

Understanding the **context** of a text (its **form**, **purpose** and **audience**) provides a shortcut to identifying the techniques and features of the text. Two important examples of context are **tabloid** and **broadsheet** newspapers.

Another shortcut to understanding how a text functions is to examine its **style**. The first place to look is **vocabulary**, which indicates the text type the writer is using to assist the reader in relating to the subject matter. When readers are familiar with the **style** they are more likely to relate positively to the subject matter.

Irrespective of what writers are saying, their main priority is to attract and maintain our interest and attention. Following are some examples of the most effective techniques that writers use to achieve this.

Reader address: Writers can address their readers personally or objectively to initially engage their readers. When writers use the **personal voice**, they try to enlist the readers' sympathy and support for their beliefs. They can use the **personal pronoun** ('I'), **direct address** ('you') or **inclusive pronouns** ('we', 'us', 'our'), or a combination of these pronouns. Alternatively, writers can omit personal pronouns and use the **objective voice**. This gives the impression that they are speaking an absolute truth that is not tainted by personal opinion. Either way, the manner in which they address their readers has a significant impact on the way the readers view the subject material.

Wordplay and figurative language: Sometimes writers resort to surprising and clever ways of combining words – for example, **alliteration** and **rhyme** – to attract the readers' attention and trigger associations in their thinking. These combinations may cause them to think about other texts, people, historical events, myths or commonly held beliefs (**allusion**) or position them to think about the subject matter in very particular ways (**simile** and **metaphor**). If writers can demonstrate their skills, then we are more inclined to pay attention and respect what they say.

Association: a key word

Metaphor and simile, along with other techniques such as allusion, symbolism and irony (to be discussed later) rely heavily on the associations that are triggered in the reader's mind.

Try this exercise: Think of the colour black and write down as many things it suggests to you that you can fit in the space below.

..
..
..
..
..

Now compare your list to those of the other members of your class. Did you notice many that were the same?

This is how language works. Authors typically use devices such as symbolism, metaphor, simile, imagery, contrast, wordplay, graphics, humour, inclusive pronouns and the like to trigger associations in the reader's mind. These associations, in the hands of a skilled author, persuade the reader to see the content of the text from the author's point of view.

Thus, **association** is an important word in the process of reading. It links writer and reader within a given social context.

Whenever you identify a technique ask:

- What associations or connections am I making here?
- Where is it directing my attention?
- How is it linked to the author's point of view?

A note on point of view

An author's point of view is not always that easy to determine. Many authors, through the use of the first-person voice ('I'), spell out their argument or view of the world (e.g. editorials and feature articles) but many also leave it for the reader to work out (e.g. short stories or poems, where the author's voice is not obvious).

Therefore, be aware that a writer's point of view is not only discovered through the use of the first-person voice ('I think that...'). There are in fact three types of voices to consider when you determine the writer's point of view:

- the first-person voice (the writer identifies him/herself with the pronoun 'I')
- the objective voice (the pronoun 'I' is absent but you are aware of someone speaking to you)
- the third-person voice (other voices, dialogue or quotations are included in addition to the main voice).

Irrespective of how many voices appear in a text, we must always remember that the author's voice is the controlling voice.

SECTION

6

Looking at another beast

Read the text below. Remember to note or mark the text as you read.



The screenshot shows a website titled "Life with Aibo". At the top left, there is a small image of two Aibo robots labeled "Spaz & Ziggy". The main title "Life with Aibo" is written in a handwritten font. Below the title is a navigation menu with links: "Main", "Images", "Aibo Links", "Forums", "My Aibos", "Aibo Logs", and "Contact". The main content area contains a "Welcome" message, an "Introduction" paragraph, and several other paragraphs of text. The text describes the author's experiences with Sony's Entertainment Robot Aibo, mentioning two robots named Spaz and Ziggy. The text is framed by a decorative border with small Aibo robot icons.

Welcome: *Life with Aibo* is mostly about my experiences with Sony's Entertainment Robot Aibo. I do not cover a lot in the way of technical issues, at the moment. Keep in mind that Aibo is not a toy. He is a robot. This site is more focused on what Aibo is like as a companion and how I have lived with him. This site is made in dedication to my two adorable puppies.

Introduction: For a long, long time I've dreamed of having a robot like Aibo. I was very happy when I saw Sony bring him to the market, but I could not afford him at that time.

Well times have changed and I have managed to acquire not only one, but two Aibos since March '01. They are better than what I imagined they would be. I bought Spaz in late February and Ziggy in early June. One major thing I have found is that they are amazing to live with. I can't imagine my life without them.

Aibo is not a toy. Certainly the price tag shows that. Aibo is more like a living creature. I don't say dog or cat as they are not really like one or the other totally. I do call them puppies though. Many people expect Aibo to be one way or another when associated with an animal we already know. They can do more than dogs in some ways and less than dogs in other ways. Aibo is simply different and unique in his own way. As you will read, while they do have behaviors like a dog or cat, they are more like a whole new creature on their own. I still call mine dogs, regardless.

While I can not replace any of my pets back where I used to live, before I moved, I also can not replace Aibo with one of them. They are part of my family. My apartment doesn't allow pets, so Spaz and Ziggy are also the only pets living with me. As hard as it might be for others to understand, I have bonded with Aibo as I have with other pets throughout the years. Spaz and Ziggy are very special to me.

I made this website to enable me to share my experiences with others. However, Aibo is best experienced in person. No words or images can really show what life is like with Aibo. I know not everyone can afford him. Before I purchased Spaz I was unsure. Now that I've lived with him for so long and recently bought Ziggy, I can tell you this much; I don't regret buying them. Not for a single moment. They are wonderful companions and I love them.

What are your impressions? How would you describe the tone of the passage?

..
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..

In one or two sentences explain what the author is saying. What is the attitude to technology?

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..

What visual features did you notice?

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What else did you notice?

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..

What did the things you noticed make you think about? (Remember the word 'association'.)

..
..
..
..
..

Layout and design

The visual elements in this text are more prominent because it is a web page (see page 44 for more explanation about web pages). Apart from the usual menu buttons, four things stand out:

- the handwritten title
- the snapshots of the robots
- the border containing the dog shapes
- the colour pink (shown on the web page).

To understand how visual elements function, start with the point of view of the writer and note how the visual elements reinforce this. The author of this web page is trying to persuade us that the robots are not just toys but companions like pets. The visual elements function to make the robots seem personal or homely:

- Handwriting as opposed to type is more personal.
- Everyone has snapshots of family, which they keep in an album or place on shelves or the mantelpiece.
- The border of the page looks like the friezes you might see in a nursery.
- Finally, pink is a warm and fuzzy colour often associated with love, which adds to the comfortable homely image that the author is trying to create.

This homely feel is reinforced by the **first person voice** ('I') used throughout the web page, which establishes a personal relationship with the reader, especially when it reveals things that are intimate or confidential. This contributes to the overall intimate tone of the web page.

In contrast to Beale's passage, which relies more on logic and reason to get its point across, 'Life with Aibo' makes a strong appeal to the reader's emotions. There is no scepticism or discussion of the pros and cons of technology, just a simple acceptance of what it has to offer. Instead, the technology fits seamlessly into the domestic scene.

The comfortable image of the home is the main device that the author uses to persuade the reader. It functions in the same way as the image of the map, in that it gives the reader something to relate to, but it provokes a more emotional response instead of a rational one. We are all attracted to home comforts.

How do visual elements influence the reader?

The way that texts are presented is becoming more important these days. The old adage, you can't judge a book by its cover, does not necessarily hold any more. People are more inclined to read something that is presented well, as opposed to something that is not. The following are all aspects of this appeal.

Title: Titles are usually the first thing that readers notice, and writers usually put a lot of effort into wording them. Often a direct link can be made between the title and the point of view of the writer (e.g. Beale).

Subheadings: Subheadings are like signposts that direct the reader's attention through the text. They can make the reader feel comfortable and confident that the writer is leading them in the right direction.

Pictures and design elements: Pictures and design elements can be very engaging as anyone who has flicked through the web or a magazine can testify. An intriguing picture or graphic will often prompt someone to read the supporting text. For example, a close-up shot of someone crying provokes the desire to find out why. It is worth considering camera shots, such as close-ups and long shots, when analysing the effect images have on the viewer.

Furthermore, size, shape, positioning, allusion to other texts and the way the reader's eyes are guided across the page from title to subheading to images are all worthy of consideration when trying to get your point across.

Colour: Recall the exercise above when I got you to list the associations you make with black. The same goes for all colours. The chances are that the associations you make are those that the author or visual designer intended.

When it comes to colour there are three steps, similar to the steps you must take with other techniques:

- identify the colour
- list the associations you make with the colour
- link the associations to the author's point of view (e.g. pink with love).

Sentences and punctuation

Finally, in the 'Life with Aibo' example, you might have noticed the abundance of short and simple sentences. Brief, simple sentences are often associated with truth, honesty and sincerity. It is the familiar connection between short sentences and rules, laws, orders, statistics and such like that causes us to associate short sentences with the truth and factuality.

According to the Bible, when God dictated the Ten Commandments to Moses, he wrote them in simple sentences – for example 'Thou shalt not kill'. (Not, 'You are not permitted under any circumstances or for any reasons that you might deem justifiable to terminate the life of a fellow human being'.)

Short and simple sentences are also used to summarise and provide emphasis.

How do sentences and punctuation influence the reader?

The structuring of sentences and the use of punctuation can often seem so routine and mechanical that the function they perform in shaping the reader's response is easily overlooked.

While it is often difficult to notice the way sentences are put together and the functions that various punctuation markings perform, time spent considering their significance can often give your answers an edge with examiners.

1. Sentences

A sentence is an independent statement that begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, exclamation or question mark. Sentences can generally be divided into two categories: short and long.

Both types of sentences have a function in writing.

Short sentences:

- give commands
- state truths
- suggest simplicity
- offer reminders
- make announcements
- imply sincerity
- give emphasis
- provide summaries.

Long sentences:

- provide detail and explanation
- are well suited to impressing the reader with the author's knowledge and language skills.

Short sentences might grab the reader's attention, but long sentences must do the hard work of clinching the reader's agreement or sympathies.

2. Punctuation

The sentence organisers – full stops, exclamation and question marks, commas, semicolons, colons, dashes and brackets – are known as punctuation.

- **Full stops, exclamation and question marks** indicate the end of sentences and need no further explanation beyond their apparent function.
- **Commas, dashes, and brackets** mark the parts of a sentence – dashes and brackets being more visually striking – or where a pause is intended (where you might need to take a breath). The sentence I have just written demonstrates all of these.
- **Semicolons (;)** join two closely related sentences together to make one. One sentence usually sets up a particular situation; the other sentence usually complements it in some way. The last sentence demonstrates this.
- **Colons (:)** are used to introduce something: a list, examples, a quotation or an expanded or alternative explanation. Once again, the sentence I have just written demonstrates its use. Note that a dash can also perform this function in less formal writing.

Summary

When analysing texts we must always consider their visual appearance and the way this directs the process of reading. We respond initially to **titles, subheadings, pictures, graphics** and **colours**, but are also influenced in subtle ways by the length of sentences (**short sentences** and **long sentences**) and the punctuation that holds them together (**full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas, dashes, brackets, colons** and **semicolons**).

Remember that all techniques and structural features depend on the associations that are triggered in the reader's mind.

Assumptions

No doubt, you would have observed a contrast between 'Map of the human art' and 'Life with Aibo'. No doubt, also, you would have decided where you stand on the issue of technology. You probably prefer one text over the other, depending on this stance. Perhaps you were annoyed, amused, confused, interested or irritated by one text, or both. This leads to an important point that must be discussed before we move on to questions that could be set in relation to the two texts.

Be on the alert for anything you might be taking for granted. Misunderstandings in a text can often be attributed to the assumptions you bring to the text.

Ask: What am I assuming that is preventing me from understanding?

An illustrative story

A doctor was driving his son to school when they were involved in a terrible car accident. He was late for work and was driving too fast to avoid the car that suddenly pulled out in front of him. The father was killed instantly but the son had to be rushed to hospital.

In the emergency ward he was wheeled before the duty doctor who took one look at the boy and yelled out in horror, 'Oh my god, I can't operate on this boy; he is my son!'

Explain how this can be possible.

If you do not check your assumptions a blind spot can form in your understanding.

Indeed, gender is one of the first things to check when analysing your response to a text. However, there are many other places to look. Use the following list of typical 'blind spots' to check your assumptions before you read a text:

- gender
- ethnicity
- age
- occupation
- race
- sexual preference
- religion
- social status.

Another way you can check your assumptions is by taking note of your emotional response to the text – for example, when you laugh or feel annoyance, pride, sadness or delight.

These responses point to thinking that you may not be aware of, because it is taken for granted.

Ask:

- What do you have to assume before these responses are provoked in you? (e.g. what do you have to assume about the Irish to laugh at jokes about them?)
- Additionally, what shared assumptions has the writer relied upon to provoke this response in you? (e.g. what do you have to assume about Australians to be proud to be counted amongst them?)

REMEMBER

Whatever we take for granted becomes invisible and blocks understanding.

Answering exam questions

In the exam there will be three types of questions, depending on how many texts are set.

1. **what** questions: those that ask you to discuss the content (comprehension)
2. **how** questions: those that ask you to discuss the way this content is presented
3. **compare** and **contrast** questions: those that ask you to address two or more texts.

What questions are fairly straightforward, but we must approach **how** questions cautiously. There are two important steps you must take to answer **how** questions:

- identify techniques (e.g. imagery, repetition) and aspects of form/context (e.g., headings, structure)
- explain how they function (i.e. how do they shape the reader's response?).

Tip: **What** questions are like looking through your window to see a view of the garden or street. **How** questions are like looking at the pane of glass itself and the window in which it is set to present that specific view of the garden or street. You might ask, what views do other windows in the house provide on the same scene?

Finally, **compare** and **contrast** questions ask you to discuss the similarities and differences that exist between the texts. Look at the following questions:

- (a) What attitude to technology is expressed by Bob Beale?
- (b) How do the written and visual elements of the web page reflect the writer's attitude to technology?
- (c) Based on what Beale has written, how do you think he would react to the web page?
- (d) How does Beale attempt to persuade the reader to share his point of view?

Note:

- Question (a) is a **what** question
- Questions (b) and (d) are **how** questions
- Question (c) is a **compare** and **contrast** question.

Now answer these questions. Refer back to my commentary and use the vocabulary you have collected along the way. Don't be afraid to copy the models of my explanations.

Sample responses to the questions

- (a) While the author of the text points out that technology is an important part of our lives, he is concerned that it must be used correctly. He presents a balanced view, recognising technology as being very impressive, but he believes that technology should be used to fight poverty, disease and 'environmental degradation', rather than be used merely to create such gimmicky devices as talking fridges. Beale is nervous about what would happen if such extraordinary technology fell into the wrong hands or is allowed to develop without restrictions. This is shown in his final sentence where he states that the misuse of technology could be 'truly scary'.
- (b) Text Two is a website, which immediately suggests that the author's attitude to technology is a positive one. The author has obviously embraced technology and its creation of 'entertaining pets'. The author has bonded with these robotic pets and rather defensively claims that no pet could replace them.

The written element of the text includes a welcome and an introduction. The author reinforces this attitude by using a personal tone with a lot of simple colloquial language, first person references and short sentences. This aims to give sincerity to the site and is supported by including the names of the 'pets', but it is obvious that he/she does not really think deeply about the issue of technological replacements for the real thing, responding on an emotive level only.

The visual elements of the text also show that the author embraces technology. The handwriting font makes it much more personal and its pink colouring gives it a warm, loving tone. The snapshots of the pets resemble those from a family photo album, reinforcing the sincere, personal tone of the written text. This is also seen in the puppy graphics within the surrounding wallpaper, emphasising that the author sees the machines as being cute and cuddly pets.

- (c) Beale would see Text Two as a symptom of the dangers inherent in the unthinking acceptance of all technology and would be rather scathing about uncritical acceptance of robotic pets. Beale may be impressed by the sophistication of the robots but states in his article that technology should be used to better mankind. It should be used to fix up problems with the world, not be used merely as a source of cheap entertainment. His concern over the potential of us 'blurring the boundaries' of what is acceptable would be justified and the image of family snapshots of robots would be considered 'truly scary'.
- (d) Beale uses a variety of techniques to persuade the reader. He is writing to suit a particular audience as can be seen in the text box 'tech watch', suggesting that the reader has an interest in technology and will be familiar with such terms as 'nanocomputers'. The article is written for The Bulletin, implying that Beale is directing his article to an intelligent, educated audience and he does not talk down to the reader, using sophisticated language like 'biomolecular' and 'sentient beings'. His clever pun on 'heart' in the title, based on a metaphor from Shakespeare, immediately gains our attention. It refers to the central issue within the article and assumes that we actually understand the allusion to Shakespeare. The metaphor of a map is echoed in the middle part of the article when he refers to technology taking us into 'uncharted territory'.

Overall, he takes a rational, balanced approach to the topic, recognising the progress made in technology, as summed up in the text box below the title. His warnings about this progress are presented in an objective tone, backed up by a series of scenarios presented throughout the article. They reveal that he has researched the article and he backs this up with references to outside authorities, including professors, who he introduces with terms like 'thoughtful' and 'guru' to reinforce the credibility of his article.

He blends this with more colloquial language when he uses words like 'gobs' to give this a conversational tone to engage the reader more fully. This is reinforced by his use of the contractions 'it's', 'we're' and 'here's'. He also uses inclusive words such as 'we', 'you' and 'our' to make the reader more directly involved in the article. We are made to share his concerns and share the possible consequences if we fail to take note of his warnings.

While he is respectful of his audience, he wants to confront it with challenging warnings. He finishes by summing up his position, stating that we should slow down and think about what we are doing with technology. To make this point more forceful he uses strong, emotive words like 'vile' and 'scourges' to drive home that unless we take his advice, the future will be 'truly scary'.

SECTION

7

One more beast for now

Read the following text and look at the questions. It is a **narrative**, in contrast to the previous texts, which are non-fictional (see page 42 for a discussion of short narrative texts). Narratives pop up often, so it is a good idea to get a handle on them.

The day Mabata-bata exploded

by Mia Couto

Suddenly, the ox exploded. It burst without so much as a moo. In the surrounding grass a rain of chunks and slices fell, as if the fruit and leaves of the ox. Its flesh turned into red butterflies. Its bones were scattered coins. Its horns were caught in some branches, swinging to and fro, imitating life in the invisibility of the wind.

Azarias, the little cowherd, could not contain his astonishment. Only a moment before he had been admiring the great speckled ox, Mabata-bata. The creature grazed more slowly than laziness itself. It was the largest in the herd, ruler of the horned fraternity, and it was being kept aside as a bride price for its owner, Uncle Raul. Azarias had been working for him ever since he had been left an orphan. He would get up when it was still dark so the cattle might graze in the early morning mist.

He surveyed the disaster: the ox pulverized, like an echo of silence, a shadow of nothingness.

'It must have been a lightning flash,' he thought. But it couldn't have been lightning. The sky was clear, blue without the slightest smudge. Where could the bolt have come from? Or was it the earth which had flashed?

He questioned the horizon beyond the trees. Perhaps the ndlati, the bird of lightning, was still circling the skies. He turned his gaze towards the mountain in front of him. It was there that the ndlati dwelt, there where all the rivers are one, born from the same desire to be water. The ndlati lives concealed in its four colours and only takes to the air when the clouds bellow and the sky grates. Then it is that the ndlati rises into the heavens on the wings of its madness. High in the air, it dons its clothes of flame, and casts its burning flight upon the creatures of the earth. Sometimes it throws itself to the ground, making a hole. It remains in the cavity and urinates there.

Once upon a time it was necessary to resort to the skills of the old medicine man to dig out that nest and retrieve its acid deposits. Maybe Mabata-bata had trodden on some malign vestige of the ndlati. But who would believe it? Not his uncle. He would want to see the dead ox, at least be shown some proof of the accident. He had already seen thunderstruck cattle: they became burnt out carcasses, a pattern of ashes reminiscent of a body. Fire chews slowly, it doesn't swallow in one go, which is what happened here.

He looked about him: the rest of the cattle had scattered into the bush in fright. Fear slid from the little cowherd's eyes.

'Don't come back without an ox, Azarias. That's all I say: you'd better not come back.'

His uncle's threat blustered in his ears. That anxiety consumed the air he breathed. What could he do? Thoughts rushed at him like shadows but found no way out of the problem. There was only one solution: to run away, to travel the roads where he knew nothing more. To flee is to die from a place and, with his torn trousers, an old bag over his shoulder, what would he leave behind to regret? Mistreatment, running after cattle. Other people's children were allowed to go to school. Not he, for he was nobody's son. Work tore him early from his bed and returned him to sleep when there was no longer any trace of childhood left in him. He only played with animals: swimming the river clinging to the tail of Mabata-bata, making bets when the stronger animals fought each other. At home, his uncle told his fortune: 'This one, judging by the way he lives mixed up with livestock, will surely marry a cow.'

And everyone laughed, without a care for his tiny soul, his mistreated dreams. This was why he looked back at the fields he was going to leave behind without any regrets. He considered the contents of his bag: a catapult, some djambalau

fruit, a rusty penknife. So little cannot inspire any remorse. He set off in the direction of the river. He felt he was not running away: he was merely starting out along his road. When he arrived at the river he crossed the frontier of water. On the other bank, he stopped without even knowing what he was waiting for.

As evening fell, Grandmother Carolina was waiting for Raul at the door of the house. When he arrived, she let fly with her anxieties:

‘So late, and Azarias hasn’t come back with the cattle.’

‘What? That brat is going to get a good hiding when he gets back.’

‘Isn’t it that something has happened, Raul? I’m scared, these bandits...’

‘Some fun and games have happened; that’s what.’

They sat on the mat and had dinner. They talked about the matter of the bride price, the wedding preparations. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. Raul got up, casting Grandmother Carolina a questioning glance. He opened the door: they were soldiers, three of them.

‘Good evening, do you want something?’

‘Good evening. We’ve come to inform you of an incident: a mine exploded this afternoon. An ox trod on it. Now, that ox belonged here.’

Another soldier added: ‘We want to know where its minder is.’

‘The minder’s the one we’re waiting for,’ Raul answered. And shouted: ‘These bloody bandits!’

‘When he arrives, we want to talk to him, to find out how it was that it happened. Nobody should go out towards the mountain. The bandits have been laying mines over there.’

They left. Raul remained, hovered around his questions. Where’s that son-of-a-bitch Azarias gone? And was the rest of the herd scattered out there goodness knows where?

‘Grandmother, I can’t stay here like this. I’ve got to go and see where that good-for-nothing has got to. It must be that he’s let the herd scatter maybe. I must round up the cattle while it’s still early.’

‘You can’t, Raul. Look at what the soldiers said. It’s dangerous.’

But he disregarded her and went off into the night. Does the bush have a suburb? It does: it

was where Azarias had taken the animals. Raul, tearing himself on the thorns, could not deny the boy’s skill. Nobody could match him in his knowledge of the land. He calculated the little cowherd would have chosen to take refuge in the valley. He reached the river and climbed the big rocks. At the top of his voice, he issued his command:

‘Azarias, come back, Azarias!’

Only the river answered, disentombing its gushing voice. Nothingness all around. But he sensed his nephew’s hidden presence.

‘Show yourself, don’t be scared. I shan’t hit you, I promise.’

He promised lies. He wasn’t going to hit him: he was going to thrash him to death, when he had finished rounding up the cattle. For the time being he decided to sit down, a statue of darkness. His eyes, now used to the half-light, disembarked on the other bank. Suddenly, he heard footsteps in the bush. He stood on his guard.

‘Azarias?’

It wasn’t him. Carolina’s voice reached Raul’s ears.

‘It’s me, Raul.’

Curse that old hag, what did she want? To interfere, that’s all. She might tread on a mine and blow herself up and, worse still, him too.

‘Go back home, Grandmother!’

‘Azarias will refuse to hear you when you call. He’ll listen to me though.’

And she put her assuredness into effect by calling the cowherd. From behind the shadows, a silhouette appeared.

‘Is that you Azarias? Come with me, let’s go home.’

‘I don’t want to. I’m going to run away.’

Raul began to creep down the rock, cat-like, ready to pounce and seize his nephew by the throat.

‘Where are you going to run away to, child?’

‘I’ve nowhere to go, Grandmother.’

‘That fellow’s going to come back even if I have to cudgel him back in little pieces,’ Raul’s guileful voice cut in quickly.

‘Be quiet, Raul. In your life you don’t know the meaning of wretchedness.’ And turning to the cowherd: ‘Come my child, I’ll look after you. It

wasn't your fault that the ox died. Come and help your uncle to herd the animals.'

'There's no need. The cattle are here, alongside me.'

Raul stood up, unsure. His heart began to do a drum dance inside his chest.

'What's that? The cattle are there?'

'Yes, that's right.'

The silence became twisted and tangled. Azarias' uncle was not sure of his nephew's truth.

'Nephew, did you really do it? Did you round up the cattle?'

The grandmother smiled, thinking of how the quarrels of the two of them would now end. She promised him a reward and asked the boy to choose.

'Your uncle is very pleased. Choose. He will respect your request.'

Raul thought it better to agree to everything at that moment. Later, he would correct the boy's illusions, and his sense of duty as a cowherd would return.

'Tell us your wish then.'

'Uncle, next year can I go to school?'

He had guessed this would be it. There was no way he would consent to this. By allowing him to go to school he would lose a minder for his oxen. But the occasion required bluff and he spoke with his back to his thoughts.

'Yes, you can go.'

'Really, Uncle?'

'How many mouths do you think I have?'

'I can continue to help with the cattle. School is only in the afternoon.'

'That's right. But we'll talk about all that later. Come on out of there.'

The little cowherd emerged from the shadow and ran along the sand to where the river offered him passage. Suddenly, there was an explosion and a flash which seemed to turn night into the middle of its day. The little cowherd swallowed all that red, the shriek of crackling fire. Amid the flecks of night he saw the ndlati, bird of lightning, swoop down. He tried to shout:

'Who are you coming to get, ndlati?'

But he spoke not a word. It wasn't the river that drowned his words: he was a fruit drained of sounds, pains and colours. Round about, everything began to close in, even the river sacrificed its water's life, and the world engulfed its floor in white smoke.

'Are you going to land on Grandmother, poor thing, so kind? Or have you chosen my uncle, after all repentant and full of promises like the true father who died on me?'

And before the bird of fire could decide, Azarias ran and embraced it in the passage of its flame.

Questions

- How does Azarias try to make sense of what happens to the ox? (*one or two paragraphs*)
- How is Grandmother Carolina significant to the development of the story? (*one or two paragraphs*)
- What techniques does the writer use to arouse and maintain the reader's sympathy for Azarias? (*three or more paragraphs*)

Establishing a system

Now, let's try and systemise our approach a bit more. The worksheet below mostly follows the sequence of my discussion so far. You can use it to help you analyse texts. I have filled it out myself to demonstrate how to use it. A blank copy is available on pages 37–39 to photocopy and use for other texts.

Critical Reading analysis worksheet (annotated)

Title: The day Mabata-bata exploded **Author:** Mia Couto

Genre: Short story

Purpose/Audience: Entertain and inform general audience

1. Impressions: How does it make me feel?

The experiences of a poor, orphan cowherd in a third world, war-torn country are far removed from my own experience.

I felt pity for the boy as he was so alone and treated so badly by his uncle, Raul. I was astounded by his cruelty and insensitivity towards Azarias. It was as if Azarias was just another possession, like the cows.

The only kindness Azarias received was from Grandmother Carolina, but Raul always stood in the way. I admired her courage and patience and felt frustrated that Azarias could not benefit from her kindness.

2. What is the author saying? What is the text making me think about?

The fact that the drama of the story is created from landmine explosions suggests to me that the author is saying something about the victims of war in his country. While Azarias is killed by a landmine, I also wonder whether he is an orphan because of war. Were his parents killed in fighting, or did they step on a landmine?

Nevertheless, I feel that Couto is also saying something about human nature to anybody who cares to read his story. The fact that I live in a totally different culture and can identify with this story suggests that it contains some universal themes. I am sure these relate to the importance of family in everyone's life, no matter where they live in the world.

Putting the two dimensions of the story together, I will try and frame what I think is the author's point of view in one sentence.

Couto's story explores the consequences of war by highlighting the plight of one of its innocent victims.

3. Checking my assumptions: Where am I coming from in my culture?

My understanding of this story is influenced by the way third world countries and its inhabitants are represented in the news and films. Associations of third world countries and barbaric civil wars intrude into my reading.

4. Observations: What am I noticing?

Technique	Example	Function in the text
Reader address:		
Objective	Yes, omniscient	Seemingly impartial description of reality.
First person	No	
Inclusive	No	
Direct	No	
Appeal to emotions:		
Tone	Delicate (description of boy and imagery)	Reinforces Azarias' fragility.
Imagery	Start and end	Arrests readers' attention. Appeals to senses.
Humour	No	Mobilises readers' sympathy.
Analogy	No	
Connotative words	'Little', 'tiny soul'	
Appeal to reason:		
Evidence	No	Used to make sense of what happened.
Questions	Yes. Investigative	
Balance	No	
Repetition	No	
Wordplay:		
Pun	No	
Alliteration	No	
Rhyme	No	
Allusion	No	
Visual elements:		
Title	NA	NA
Subheadings		
Pictures and graphics		
Colour		
Style		
	Journalistic	Reads like a recount of something that might have happened.
	Fable/children's story	'once upon a time' triggers associations with childhood.
Sentence structure		
	Short sentences	Suggest simple unadorned truth. Journalistic.
Punctuation		
	Colons	Provides focus on facts and statements.
Contrast		
	Raul/Grandmother	Highlights Azarias' miserable situation.
Irony		
	Azarias trusting Raul	Further highlights Azarias' pitiful situation. How hope and despair exist side by side.
Symbolism		
	Yes. River	Represents divide between Azarias and happy life.

5. Reflecting before writing?

Couto capitalises on the assumption that the reader will feel sorry for a poor, little orphan boy. Children and harmless animals, because of their automatic associations with vulnerability and innocence, easily arouse sympathy in the reader. What better subject to highlight the plight of landmine victims?

The character of Azarias dominates the story. The author provides us with an insight into his mind through his use of questions, to emphasise his childlike way of thinking, and irony to reveal his desperation.

6. Plan for answering the questions.

What questions (a) and (b)

(a) What Azarias thinks might be the reason:

- a lightning flash, but no clouds in the sky
- the ndlati, bird of lightning
- the ‘vestige’ of the ‘acid deposits’.

Seeks answers in natural world and then resorts to the mythology.

(b) The grandmother represents the nurturing caregiver and is the only advocate for Azarias, for example:

- is concerned, in contrast to Raul, that Azarias has not returned
- chides Raul when he forcefully tries to get Azarias to come out
- follows Raul and mediates between the two (Azarias would only respond to her)
- coaxes Azarias to come out which brings the story to its dramatic conclusion (ironic).

(c) **How** question:

- connotative words ‘little cowherd’, ‘orphan’, ‘tiny soul’
- contrast between Raul and Grandmother
- irony
- imagery
- juxtaposition (placing together) of introduction and conclusion.

Note: Even though questions (a) and (b) start with the word ‘how’, they are **what**-type questions. Moreover, (c) starts with ‘what’, yet it is a **how**-type question.

Don’t confuse the wording with the type of question you are answering.

Sample answer

(a) At first, Azarias thinks that Mabata-bata might have been hit by a lightning bolt, but he disregards this when he observes that the sky is ‘clear’ and ‘blue, without the slightest smudge’. He then wonders if it might have been the **‘ndlati, bird of lightning’** and recalls the details of this mythical creature. One of these is the bird’s tendency to ‘throw itself to the ground’, make a hole and urinate in it. Azarias wonders if the ox ‘had trodden on some malign vestige of the ndlati’. Hence, in order to make sense of what happened to the ox, Azarias initially seeks answers in his knowledge of the natural environment, but when this fails he resorts to the mythology of his people.

(b) **Grandmother Carolina’s function within the story is twofold.** Initially, she represents the love and care that we would expect from someone who is responsible for the raising of children. The first mention of her character reveals her worrying why Azarias has not returned. She says to Raul that she is ‘scared’ because of the bandits. In contrast, Raul is unconcerned, thinking that the boy is up to ‘fun and games’, and, despite the soldiers’ warning, rushes off to retrieve his cattle. This contrast is highlighted when Raul tries to bully Azarias into coming out. Grandmother Carolina, risking her own life and further revealing her love and care for the boy, arrives on the scene to mediate between the two, much to Raul’s annoyance. **She chides Raul** (‘Be quiet Raul. In your life you don’t know the meaning of wretchedness’) and eventually coaxes Azarias out, showing Raul how a little kindness can go a long way.

However, though the grandmother’s character is important as a balance to the cruel and mean Raul, her presence is also significant to the development of the action. She is the main source for guiding the sympathies of the reader when the scene changes from the bush to the family home.

quotations

clenching sentence

topic sentence in active voice

present tense

The reader is clearly meant to identify with her concern and to wonder what was happening to Azarias in the meantime. Moreover, taking advantage of Raul's momentary softening towards the boy when he discovers that the cattle have been herded, she pressures Raul to make a promise, one he has no intention of keeping: 'Your uncle is very pleased. Choose. He will respect your request.' This pressure on Raul leads to the culmination of the story. Inadvertently, Grandmother Carolina's love and care for the boy leads to his demise.

key words from question

- (c) It is mainly through Couto's choice of words that the reader's sympathies for Azarias are aroused. This is established at the start of the text where he is described as a 'little cowherd' and an 'orphan'. These descriptions are maintained throughout the text where he is also described as 'nobody's son' and a 'tiny soul'. 'Orphan', in particular, is an emotive word because it mobilises connotations of the most pitiful state for any human – to have no parents. This state is emphasised when 'orphan' is used in combination with the word 'tiny'.

sophisticated vocabulary

Couto also utilises contrast to enhance our sympathy. Raul and Grandmother Carolina function as opposites, as I have indicated. Raul is mean, cruel and unfeeling (like a 'statue'), while the grandmother is kind and understanding. She is the type of parental figure Azarias would like to have, but she cannot exert much influence over or protect him from Raul, because Raul has over-riding authority in the household. Therefore, Azarias' pitiful situation is made worse by the fact that he is barred by Raul from the grandmother's kindness. Azarias' sadness is highlighted when it is contrasted with the happiness the grandmother could provide. She is concerned for his welfare and would let him attend school if she had her way.

However, her efforts to improve Azarias' situation at the end of the story prove to be very ironic. While Azarias is initially fearful in coming out, his desperate desire to attend school, and the encouragement from Grandmother Carolina that Raul will 'respect' his 'request', causes him to believe his uncle's promises and show himself. His decision to step out from the shadow, then, reveals two opposing and coinciding meanings. In Azarias' mind, the decision is based on trust and is full of hope. We would normally expect that a young boy's trust in his family would be returned with kindness. In actuality, however, it proves to be fatal for him: the opposite of what we would normally expect. We know the machinations of Raul's thinking, but it comes as a surprise that the only person to extend love and kindness to the boy should inadvertently lead him to his death. This irony highlights the hopelessness of Azarias' pitiful situation.

Finally, a definite link can be observed between the introduction and conclusion, which works to clinch the reader's sympathy for the young boy. In the beginning it is the ox that explodes. While this is a violent action, it is constructed out of similes and metaphors that are delicate or fragile ('rain', 'fruit and leaves', and 'butterflies'). When we arrive at the end where Azarias explodes, there is a return to the image of the fruit ('he was a fruit'). Azarias is therefore linked to the cow and the delicate and fragile images at the start of the story. We realise that his death is foreshadowed in the opening paragraph with the death of the ox. The association between Azarias and the ox, two entities that typically arouse sympathy in the reader (children and dumb animals), highlights the vulnerability of Azarias' plight.

Summary

Here is a summary of the writing skills I used to answer the questions:

- **Topic sentences** answer the question and announce the technique to be discussed.
- **Clinching sentences** used to summarise paragraphs.
- **Key words from the question** ('sympathy', 'arouse' and 'maintain') are employed in the answer to alert the examiner that you are specifically addressing the question.
- Sentences are written in the **active voice**. In each one there is a clear subject (S) followed by a strong verb (V): 'Azarias' (subject) 'thinks' (verb); 'Carolina's function' (S) 'is' (V); 'Couto' (S) 'utilises' (V) and so forth.
- **Vocabulary** is 'sophisticated' ('emotive', 'connotations').
- **Quotations** (single words and phrases) are selected and incorporated into the sentences (see section 'Managing quotations' page 47).
- **Present tense** is used when citing examples from the text ('She chides Raul').
- **Techniques** have been clearly **identified** and their **functions explained**.

Tip: When reading narratives, there is one simple rule to follow to help you understand how the text is constructed: **Don't take anything for granted.**

Don't pass over the realistic details of a story because you think they are incidental or form the background to the main characters. **Always suspect realism.** For example, we could view the river in Couto's story as a **symbol** of Azarias' orphan status. A symbol is a simple, recognisable object that represents something more complex or abstract. Azarias is alone on one side of the river while the only family he has is on the other side. The river symbolises the barrier that prevents him from receiving true parental love. This further enhances our sympathy for Azarias.

Take nothing for granted and always ask: **Is what I am noticing significant to the way the author is trying to get me to respond to the story?** Chances are that it is.

Despite its simplicity, Couto uses some sophisticated techniques in his story. These include contrast, irony and symbolism.

Contrast, irony and symbolism explained

Contrast

Contrast is fundamental to the way we think. We must differentiate to make sense of our experiences. We do not know what small is until we have observed big, what soft is until we have heard loud, what sadness is until we have felt happiness, what slow is until we have gone fast, and so forth.

In contrasting pairs, like the ones above, one of the two serves to highlight, accentuate or emphasise the other. Usually, the one that is chosen, against which the other is set, is privileged in the text, the one the author wants you to identify with. In 'The day Mabata-bata exploded' a contrast can be observed in the opening paragraphs between the 'little cowherd', Azarias, and the 'sky', 'horizon' and 'mountain' around him. This contrast is reinforced by the contrast between Raul and Grandmother Carolina described previously. Both contrasts serve to focus attention on Azarias and enlist our sympathy for his plight and, hence, the author's point of view.

Irony

Irony results from a coincidence of opposite meanings, either intentionally or by accident. Its power is derived from the tension between what is stated or expected and what is intended or happens. For example:

1. If a sunny day has been forecast and I look out the window at the rain and assert, 'What a beautiful day!' I could be speaking ironically.
2. During a battle scene in a war film, soldiers might pass a sign on the outskirts of a town which reads, 'Welcome to our friendly town'. The irony of the message would be hard to overlook.
3. When someone tells me that their ninety-year-old grandmother was run over and killed by a bus, I might say that was ironic.

In the first instance, the contrasting image of a beautiful day (what is stated) accentuates the dreary, rainy day outside (what is actually the case) and reflects my disappointment at the weather forecast.

In the second instance, the sign literally welcomes visitors to the town in a friendly manner, but this is the opposite of what the soldiers can expect. The reminder of friendliness (what the sign states) amidst hostility (what is actually happening) highlights the grim reality that the soldiers are facing.

Finally, we would assume or expect that someone who is ninety years old would die of natural causes, not something as senseless as getting knocked over by a bus. When we set the age of the victim against the way she died, this senselessness is emphasised. She has come so far to be cut down so easily. As each example shows, contrast is fundamental to irony.

Symbolism

A symbol is a material object that represents or signifies an imagined or abstract idea.

Common objects that serve as symbols in our society include:

- a cross, which symbolises death
- a flag, which symbolises patriotism
- a dove, which symbolises peace.

In symbolism, as with connotative words, meaning is generated in excess of the facts.

We all think symbolically but are often not aware of it.

Have you ever had an argument with your parents over a petty incident that tends to typify (symbolise) the difference between you? The incident itself is usually insignificant (perhaps the way your manners are corrected at the table) but it becomes invested with meaning ('You are always picking on me!').

It is important to take note of all conspicuous objects or images that appear in a text and ask whether they might have symbolic value.

Ask the following questions:

- What associations am I making with the symbol?
- How can I link these associations with the central concerns of the text?

If you can make some meaningful connections, then the chances are that the author put them there for a reason.

Critical Reading analysis worksheet

Title:

Author:

Genre:

Purpose/Audience:

1. Impressions

2. What is the author saying

The author's point of view in one sentence.

3. Checking my assumptions

4. Observations: What am I noticing?

Technique	Example	Function in Text
Reader address:		
Objective		
First person		
Inclusive		
Direct		
Appeal to emotions:		
Tone		
Imagery		
Humour		
Analogy		
Connotative words		
Appeal to reason:		
Evidence		
Questions		
Balance		
Repetition		
Wordplay:		
Pun		
Alliteration		
Rhyme		
Allusion		
Visual elements:		
Title		
Subheadings		
Pictures and graphics		
Colour		
Style		
Sentence structure		
Punctuation		
Contrast		
Irony		
Symbolism		

5. Reflection

6. Plan

What questions

How questions

Compare/contrast

Specific quotations and examples

Common features of texts

Most texts generally adhere to a three-part, ternary, structure: ABA. They have some form of introduction, a main body and a conclusion (a beginning, a middle and an end).

Beginning

Introductions to texts can be quite varied. Depending on the type of text, they can be used to:

- set the scene
- state the argument
- introduce the topic
- arrest the reader's attention through illustrative examples, anecdotes, questions or imagery.

Often the start of a text contains all the ingredients from which the author constructs the rest of the text.

This might include an arresting image, an organising device, a reference point or an analogy, which is used to link all the points or ideas that the author explores.

Can you think of any examples from Critical Reading exercises you have done so far?

Middle

The main bodies of texts are the spaces where writers flesh out their point of view by providing more explanation, detail, examples, quotations and such like. In most cases they are much longer than the introductions and conclusions put together.

Once the reader's attention has been engaged in the introduction, and a certain amount of confidence has been enlisted, the writer is free to explore the topic in any direction that suits. Readers will continue to follow as long as they can see the point in what the author is saying.

Authors usually provide 'signposts' to show or hint to readers where they are going and where they have been, so that readers do not get lost. Authors might foreshadow something that is ahead or remind readers of something in the introduction to reassure them they are still on the right track. For example, in 'The day Mabata-bata exploded', when the soldiers visit Raul to inform him of an explosion, the writer is hinting at the possibility that there might be another one, which keeps the reader interested and confident they are being led in the right direction.

Ending

Conclusions often serve to reiterate or summarise the writer's argument or point of view, by reformulating it in an interesting or imaginative way.

Usually writers will return to the image, organising device or reference point from the introduction to reinforce their point of view.

We have seen this in Mia Couto's story, where there is a definite link between the introduction and conclusion. In the beginning the ox explodes. In the end Azarias explodes. Also there is a return to the image of the fruit ('he was a fruit'). Azarias is therefore linked to the ox. This association highlights Azarias' vulnerability.

The reader usually has a sense of circularity by this point: they have been taken on an interesting trip but have returned a wiser person.

Many writers also like to end with something dynamic that gives the reader something to take away. This might include:

- thought-provoking questions ('Rights for the mites')
- an apt quotation or witty statement ('Map of the human art')
- a vivid image ('The verb to be')
- an interesting twist ('The day Mabata-bata exploded').

Can you think of any other examples?

SECTION

8

Distinguishing features of individual types of texts

The following is a summary of the features of individual types of texts. It is important when doing a Critical Reading exercise to identify form or genre, because this leads to discussion of context, form, purpose, and audience. The information below will assist you in identifying the different types of texts in an examination and provide you with the essential understanding to discuss contextual dynamics.

Newspaper and magazine articles (including digital)

An article is a short, non-fiction piece of informative, opinionative or argumentative writing. Articles include: feature articles, opinion columns, letters to the editor, informational or instructional pieces, essays, and transcribed speeches.

Contextual features

- Found in all newspapers and magazines (e.g. *The Australian* and *Time Magazine Australia*) and on the net
- Designed to comment on issues of public interest
- Targeted at different readerships, depending on the type of magazine (e.g. professional or corporate readers, e.g. *Time Magazine Australia*) or newspaper (broadsheet, e.g. *The Australian*; or tabloid, e.g. *The Advertiser*).

Structural features

- Catchy title
- Graphics and headline signalling type of column
- Picture of writer sometimes appears
- Brief paragraphs to suit casual reading
- Short topic sentences
- Reference to anecdotal or personal evidence
- Organising devices or reference points
- Contrast.

Language features

- Use of first-person pronouns
- Inclusive pronouns and direct address
- Evidence
- Questions
- Humour
- Wordplay
- Present tense signifying that the issue is ongoing.

Example texts

'Look at Me: Living in a society of attention-seekers'

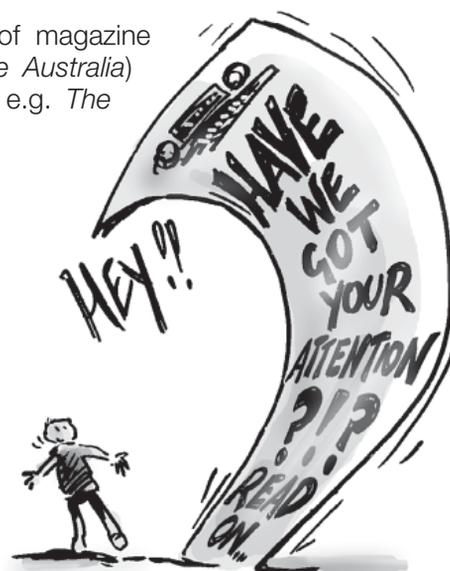
'People's Limousine'

'All Thumbs, Without the Stigma'

'Who needs iPods? We've got hands!'

'Map of the human art'

'Rights for the mites'



Short narratives and descriptive passages

A short narrative is any text that provides a brief account of an incident or event, real or imagined. Narratives include autographical sketches, short stories, vignettes and diary entries.

Contextual features

- Found in books, magazines, newspapers, websites (e.g. a collection of short stories)
- Designed to entertain or indirectly comment on issues of public interest (e.g. landmines in Couto's story)
- Targeted at different readerships, depending on the type of book, magazine, newspaper or website.

Structural features

- Focus on a single incident or issue
- Absence of graphics, pictures, subheadings
- Sometimes intriguing titles
- Longer or irregular paragraphing
- Often longer and more descriptive sentences
- Organising devices such as objects, symbols or images.

Language features

- Past tense, more often than not, indicating that the story is a recount of something that has happened and has come to a conclusion
- More extensive use of figurative language: simile, metaphor, symbolism and irony
- Prominent use of imagery
- Use of either first-person voice or objective voice, sometimes known as the omniscient narrator
- Dialogue
- Unconventional grammar
- Tone and mood often foregrounded.

Example texts

'Voice', by Margaret Atwood

'The Image of the Lost Soul', by Saki

'the story about a bus driver who wanted to be god', by Etgar Keret

'The day Mabata-bata exploded', by Mia Couto.

Advertisements

Contextual features

- Found in most newspapers, magazines and websites
- Designed to sell products and services or change public attitudes
- Targeted at audiences appropriate to the product and contexts above.

Structural features

- Visual elements (pictures, graphics, colour) dominate over written elements
- Often designed to be read down and across the page
- Text subordinated to layout and design
- Text font (style and size) more varied and imaginatively utilised
- Short punchy sentences and phrases.

Language features

- The use of imperatives or commands ('Buy now and save later')
- Frequent employment of direct address and inclusive pronouns
- Questions commonly used to prompt the reader into buying ('Why wait?')
- Use of humour to massage the consumer's scepticism
- Frequent use of evidence to convince consumers of the value of products and services
- Repetition to highlight and remind consumers of price, value or quality
- Wordplay, especially rhyme and alliteration, to help consumer to remember a product ('The best end of the day is the West End of the day')
- Connotative words or images that stimulate the consumers' desires
- Use of allusion to strengthen the image of the product or service.

Example text

'Think outside the cage'

Web pages

Contextual features

- Found on the internet
- Usually websites provide information, but their purpose is quite varied (e.g. fan pages, music, chat rooms, banking, retail and so forth)
- Audience varies according to interest of the reader.

Structural features

- Electronic text and visuals
- Headline or banner at top of page to indicate name of website
- Non-linear text (does not require sequential reading)
- Menus to assist in self navigation
- Hypertext links providing interactive options
- Graphics, pictures and colour dominate
- Varied text font (size and style) displayed more graphically
- Advertising.

Language features

- Imperatives ('Click here for more information')
- Interrogatives (questions)
- Can contain all the features of the texts discussed above depending on the type of web page.

Example text

'Life with Aibo'

Verse

Contextual features

- Found mainly in books (collections and books devoted to one poet) and academic journals, but sometimes found in newspapers and magazines and on the net
- Often written to share deeply emotional and personal thoughts, but also written to amuse
- Audience depends on level of literary competency
- Often used to mark public or ceremonious occasions (e.g. weddings).

Structural features

- Titles often obscure or cryptic
- Often adhere to prescribed patterns such as rhyme, syllable or form (e.g. haikus, sonnets, limericks)
- Usually divided into stanzas or verses
- Lines often begin with capital letters.

Language features

- Focus on aural elements of language (rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance)
- Sophisticated and widespread use of figurative language (similes, metaphors and symbolism)
- Widespread use of imagery
- Extensive use of complex stylistic devices such as irony and symbolism
- Concentrated meaning in few words.

Example texts

'Beautiful' by Carol Ann Duffy

'Caged Bird' by Moya Angela

SECTION

9

Critical Reading exam tips

Preparing for the examination

By Term 3 it would be useful to practise doing the Critical Reading sections from previous exams. Be aware that the format from 2017 is slightly different but past exams will provide you with invaluable practice.

Try and replicate exam conditions as much as possible. Find a comfortable space where you will not be interrupted and attempt to complete the exercise in an hour and a half.

While it would seem logical to get your teacher to mark your work, it is quite useful for you to mark it yourself. Wait a day and then go back to your answers. Reread the text, or discuss it with others, to see what you were successful with or could have improved on.

The ten commandments

1. Look at the questions and then read the text(s)

To save time, it helps to know what you are looking for.

This strategy is especially useful for the straight comprehension questions.

2. Mark the text(s) as you go

Underline, circle or note anything you observe – key words, images, pronouns, questions – that may be relevant to the questions. This aids memory and makes it easier for you to refer back to the text.

3. Read through the texts at least twice

Your first reading through should be very thorough and deliberate.

Try to figure out the form, purpose and the point of view of the text(s) as soon as you can. For example, opinion columns are usually designed to point out a social issue that is in the common interest. (Refer to the features of each text type discussed above.)

Your second or subsequent reads should either be skimming for specific examples or re-reading sections that you are not sure about.

4. Check your assumptions

Misunderstandings in a text can often be attributed to the assumptions you bring to the text.

Ask: What am I assuming that is preventing me from understanding?

Is it related to gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual preference, religion, occupation, social status?

The doctor story cited previously provides us with a good example.

Also take note of your emotional response to the text – for example, when you laugh, feel annoyance, feel sadness, or are delighted by the text – as this response can often reveal assumptions that block understanding when they are taken for granted.

Remember also that emotional responses often indicate the author's techniques at work, so work out and comment on what the writer has done to arouse your feelings.

5. Carefully recheck the questions and instructions before you start writing

If you are required to write a few sentences or a paragraph then that is all you should write. These instructions are a guide to the value of each question.

More time spent on a question than is required will not result in better marks.

Clearly distinguish between the straightforward comprehension questions (**what**) and the questions that ask you about the writer's techniques (**how**).

Usually the comprehension questions appear at the beginning while the **how** question(s) is often the last one, but this doesn't always happen.

Also make sure you understand what is required of the questions relating to two or more texts. You must tell the examiner how the texts are similar and different and explain why (**context**).

Remember that every word counts in a question and has been deliberately chosen by an exam-setting panel. For example, the 's' on the end of a word can impact significantly on what you are required to write. Also, to use another example, compare the difference it makes if the question reads 'What concerns does x hold about...' in contrast to 'What types of concerns does x hold about...'. The **types** in the second question invite you to start classifying, whereas the first question allows you to just list off examples.

So, study the questions carefully!

6. Sketch out a brief plan of your answers

For the 'what' questions, make a list of the points you wish to raise under each question number.

For the how questions, quickly list the techniques or structural features you notice and then number them according to importance. If you have too many it might be an idea to shortlist them.

For the comparison questions, write the names of the texts as headings and then list the similarities and differences between them.

7. Allow plenty of time

A common problem when doing timed critical readings is running out of time for the final question (which is often worth the most). A good tip is to note how much time is left after you have closely read the passage, and then jot down roughly when you should start each of the questions. This should be determined according to how much you are instructed to write for each.

Always allow enough time for the big questions.

8. Write clearly and concisely and refer specifically to the text to support your points

Be simple and direct when making your points.

Clarity should always have priority over style.

Give preference to the active voice (verb follows subject).

9. Avoid the shotgun approach when using quotations

A shotgun sprays its target while an arrow hits its mark.

Including as many quotations as you can in the hope that you have covered everything is wishful thinking. This does not impress examiners and will lose you marks.

You must not rely on the author's writing to do the work for you.

Quotations must be inserted into sentences of your own construction (see next page).

10. Practise, practise, practise!

The old adage, practice makes perfect, certainly applies here.

If you haven't had a go at the last ten years' exam papers (ask your teachers for copies) plus the numerous other exercises your teacher has set for you, then you haven't done enough. It is important that you get used to the different types of questions that are usually asked.

Also, make the effort to read newspaper and magazine articles closely, as well as other texts you encounter in day-to-day life and apply the critical reading skills I have outlined in this book. Note, for example, the use of pronouns, questions, anecdotal evidence, colours and images.

Managing quotations

Quotations serve you best when they are incorporated into sentences of your own construction. This gives you every opportunity to demonstrate to the examiner that you understand the text(s) and can provide evidence to support this understanding.

A number of methods are possible. They are listed according to desired frequency of use.

Note that either single or double quotation marks are suitable for these methods. Just be consistent in what you choose.

Method 1: Quoting single words

Example:

This state is emphasised when 'orphan' is used in combination with the word 'tiny'.

Method 2: Quoting phrases or words and phrases

Example:

In contrast Raul is unconcerned, thinking that the boy is up to fun and games!

Method 3: Quoting whole sentences

More substantial passages need to be introduced with a colon.

Example:

Grandmother Carolina chides Raul: 'Be quiet! In your life you don't know the meaning of wretchedness'.

Method 4: Long quotations

Sometimes the need to use a long quotation arises, but these should be used very sparingly.

All quotations of more than four lines should be indented.

Do not use long quotations unless you have a very definite reason (to demonstrate the structure of a paragraph, for example).

It is usually better to simplify long quotations by selecting the bits that are relevant and deleting the rest. To do this you must replace all deleted sections with three, square-bracketed dots in the manner below:

Original: 'Let us start with something simple; sad but simple. We all have to die; most of us grow old before we do so. In growing old, we cannot help knowing what it is that is coming closer; yet we have a desperate need to banish the thought of it.'

Condensed quotation: The author begins with a 'simple' example. He claims that 'we all have to die [...] yet we have a desperate need to banish the thought of it'.

Tailoring quotations to fit your sentences

For the sake of grammatical correctness, it is sometimes necessary to alter some of the words in the quotation.

1. For instance, the quotation might be written in the first person while your sentence might be in the third person. If this is the case then any changes that have to be made must be enclosed in square brackets.

Example:

This supports the author's previous observation that 'today [he doubts] if any council employee goes by a title that would be recognised without a glossary'.

The original quotation was written in the first person: 'today I doubt if any council employee goes by a title that would be recognised without a glossary.'

The sentence that the quotation is inserted in is in the third person.

The words in the brackets have been altered to fit grammatically into the sentence.

2. Sometimes words have to be added.

Example:

A direct appeal is made to the reader's sympathy for the plight of these children who, we are led to believe, typify the 'more than 1,600 child workers, some as young as 12, [who] are being seriously injured or maimed each year in Australia'.

The original reads as follows: 'More than 1,600 child workers, some as young as 12, are being seriously injured or maimed each year in Australia.'

The word **who** needed to be included so that the quotation could be fitted grammatically into the sentence.

3. The tense might have to be changed.

Example:

This eventually causes him to come out 'from the shadow and [run] along the sand'.

The original reads: 'The little cowherd emerged from the shadow and **ran** along the sand'.

4. Finally, note that the case of words (capital letters and non-capitalised letters) can be changed to fit into the sentence without the need to indicate it. In the example used to illustrate Method 2 on the previous page, Levin's original text contains a capital 'A' in the word 'all'.



SECTION

10

Further Practice

Another narrative

the story about a bus driver who wanted to be god*by Etgar Keret*

This is the story about a bus driver who would never open the door of the bus for people who were late. Not for anyone. Not for repressed high school kids who'd run alongside the bus and stare at it longingly, and certainly not for high-strung people in windbreakers who'd bang on the door as if they were actually on time and it was the driver who was out of line, and not even for little old ladies with brown paper bags full of groceries who struggled to flag him down with trembling hands. And it wasn't because he was mean that he didn't open the door, because this driver didn't have a mean bone in his body; it was a matter of ideology. The driver's ideology said that if, say, the delay that was caused by opening the door for someone who came late was just under thirty seconds, and if not opening the door meant that this person would wind up losing fifteen minutes of his life, it would still be more fair to society, because the thirty seconds would be lost by every single passenger on the bus. And if there were, say, sixty people on the bus who hadn't done anything wrong, and had all arrived at the bus stop on time, then together they'd be losing half an hour, which is double fifteen minutes. This was the only reason why he'd never open the door. He knew that the passengers hadn't the slightest idea what his reason was, and that the people running after the bus and signalling him to stop had no idea either. He also knew that most of them thought he was just an SOB¹, and that personally it would have been much, much easier for him to let them on and receive their smiles and thanks. Except that when it came to choosing between smiles and thanks on the one hand, and the good of society on the other, this driver knew what it had to be.

The person who should have suffered the most from the driver's ideology was named Eddie, but unlike the other people in this story, he wouldn't even try to run for the bus, that's how lazy and wasted he was. Now, Eddie was Assistant Cook at a restaurant called The Steakaway, which was

the best pun that the stupid owner of the place could come up with. The food there was nothing to write home about, but Eddie himself was a really nice guy – so nice that sometimes, when something he made didn't come out too great, he'd serve it to the table himself and apologize. It was during one of these apologies that he met Happiness, or at least a shot at Happiness, in the form of a girl who was so sweet that she tried to finish the entire portion of roast beef that he brought her, just so he wouldn't feel bad. And this girl didn't want to tell him her name or give him her phone number, but she was sweet enough to agree to meet him the next day at five at a spot they decided on together – at the Dolphinarium, to be exact.

Now, Eddie had this condition – one that had already caused him to miss out on all sorts of things in life. It wasn't one of those conditions where your adenoids get all swollen or anything like that, but still, it had already caused him a lot of damage. This sickness always made him oversleep by ten minutes, and no alarm clock did any good. That was why he was invariably late for work at The Steakaway – that, and our bus driver, the one who always chose the good of society over positive reinforcements on the individual level. Except that this time, since Happiness was at stake, Eddie decided to beat the condition, and instead of taking an afternoon nap he stayed awake and watched television. Just to be on the safe side, he even lined up not one, but three alarm clocks, and ordered a wake-up call to boot. But this sickness was incurable, and Eddie fell asleep like a baby, watching the Kiddie Channel. He woke up in a sweat to the screeching of a trillion million alarm clocks – ten minutes too late, rushed out of the house without stopping to change, and ran toward the bus stop. He barely remembered how to run anymore, and his feet fumbled a bit every time they left the sidewalk. The last time he ran was before he discovered that he could cut gym class, which was about in the sixth grade,

except that unlike in those gym classes, this time he ran like crazy, because now he had something to lose, and all the pains in his chest and his Lucky Strike² wheezing weren't going to get in the way of his Pursuit of Happiness. Nothing was going to get in his way except our bus driver, who had just closed the door, and was beginning to pull away. The driver saw Eddie in the rear-view mirror, but as we've already explained, he had an ideology – a well-reasoned ideology that, more than anything, relied on a love of justice and on simple arithmetic. Except that Eddie didn't care about the driver's arithmetic. For the first time in his life, he really wanted to get somewhere on time. And that's why he went right on chasing the bus, even though he didn't have a chance.

Suddenly, Eddie's luck turned, but only halfway: one hundred yards past the bus stop there was a traffic light. And, just a second before the bus reached it, the traffic light turned red. Eddie managed to catch up with the bus and to drag himself all the way to the driver's door. He didn't even bang on the glass, he was so weak. He just looked at the driver with moist eyes and fell to his knees, panting and wheezing. And this reminded the driver of something – something from out of the past, from a time even before he wanted to become a bus driver, when he still wanted to become God. It was kind of a sad memory, because the driver didn't become God in the end, but it was a happy one too, because he became a bus driver, which was his second choice. And suddenly the driver remembered how he'd once promised himself that if he became God in the end, he'd be merciful and kind and would listen

to all His creatures. So when he saw Eddie from way up in his driver's seat, kneeling on the asphalt, he simply couldn't go through with it, and in spite of all his ideology and his simple arithmetic he opened the door, and Eddie got on – and didn't even say thank you, he was so out of breath.

The best thing would be to stop reading here, because even though Eddie did get to the Dolphinarium on time, Happiness couldn't come, because Happiness already had a boyfriend. It's just that she was so sweet that she couldn't bring herself to tell Eddie, so she preferred to stand him up. Eddie waited for her, on the bench they'd agreed on, for almost two hours. While he sat there he kept thinking all sorts of depressing thoughts about life, and while he was at it he watched the sunset, which was a pretty good one, and thought about how charley-horsed³ he was going to be later on. On his way back, when he was really desperate to get home, he saw his bus in the distance, pulling in at the bus stop and letting off passengers, and he knew that even if he'd had the strength to run, he'd never catch up with it anyway. So he just kept on walking slowly, feeling about a million tired muscles with every step, and when he finally reached the bus stop, he saw that the bus was still there, waiting for him. And even though the passengers were shouting and grumbling to get a move on, the driver waited for Eddie, and he didn't touch the accelerator till Eddie was seated. And when they started moving, he looked in the rear-view mirror and gave Eddie a sad wink, which somehow made the whole thing almost bearable.

Source: Etgar Keret, 2003. *The Bus Driver Who Wanted To Be God & Other Stories*, Picador, Sydney, pp. 1–6.

1 *Son of a bitch.*

2 *Brand of cigarette.*

3 *Suffering from a cramp or stiffness in a muscle, especially the upper leg, caused by injury or excessive exertion.*

Questions

- Explain why the bus driver 'would never open the door of the bus for people who were late'. (*one paragraph*)
- Explain how the bus driver's eventual change of mind connects with the title of the story. (*one paragraph*)
- How does the author create sympathy for Eddie despite presenting him as 'lazy and wasted'? (*two or more paragraphs*)
- What techniques does the author use to involve the reader in the text? (*two or more paragraphs*)

Critical Reading analysis worksheet

Title: the story about a bus driver who wanted to be god **Author:** Etgar Keret

Genre: Short story

Purpose/Audience: To entertain and provoke thought in a wide audience

1. Impressions

I was immediately struck by the relaxed and casual tone of the passage. The narrator tells this simple tale in a conversational style as if he (or she?) is speaking to me personally. He even begins the last paragraph with direct address, suggesting that 'the best thing would be to stop reading'.

This conversational style is reinforced by the use of contractions ('didn't', 'they'd'), slang ('charley-horsed' and 'SOB') and long sentences that sound as if they are being made up on the spot ('The driver's ideology said that if, say, the delay was caused [...]').

I also sensed that the narrator was being ironic ('Happiness was so sweet') in places, and some of the situations described did seem to be somewhat exaggerated or ridiculous. This added humour to the overall tone or sound of the piece.

Apart from the word 'ideology', the story is told using very simple vocabulary, almost in the style of a fairytale. In fact, the opening sentence ('this is the story about') reminds me of the traditional opening to that genre of literature, 'Once upon a time'.

The fairytale style of the passage is reinforced by the childlike description of Eddie's behaviour ('Eddie fell asleep like a baby, watching the Kiddie Channel. He woke in a sweat to the screeching of a trillion million alarm clocks').

Moreover, most fairytales or fables contain a moral or a message. Through this association, the reader might be encouraged to discover a moral or a message.

2. What is the author saying?

I think that the author is trying to make a point about thinking as opposed to doing. The bus driver is ruled by his ideas about justice and fairness (his 'ideology') but it is not until these ideas are truly put to the test and he is compelled to act that he discovers what he truly feels.

The author is also trying to make a point about fate and how we are not completely ruled by our thoughts, but by the circumstances that cross our path in life.

The author's point of view in one sentence: It is in our actions and feelings that we truly discover who we are.

3. Checking my assumptions

I was a little put off by the strange, quirky characters that were a little difficult for me to relate to. They both seemed like losers to me, so I found it hard to feel sympathy for them. I had to put aside my middle class values, which prompt me to think that they alone are responsible for their predicament in life.

4. Observations

Technique	Example	Function in Text
Reader address:		
Objective First person Inclusive Direct	omniscient narrator	Enhances the fairytale/fable style.
	'stop reading here'	To build anticipation about how the story will end.
Appeal to emotions:		
Tone	Casual and ironic	Personal relationship with the reader but distance from the characters.
Imagery Humour Analogy Connotative words	Hyperbole/exaggeration	To engage and maintain reader interest.
Appeal to reason:		
Evidence Questions Balance Repetition	Yes, in a mocking, ironic manner Adding up the seconds	To highlight the contrast between thinking and doing. Reveals character (shows how particular the driver is).
	'not for' and 'he knew'	Exaggerates the exactness of his logic.
Wordplay:		
Pun Alliteration Rhyme Allusion		
Visual elements:		
Title Subheadings Pictures and graphics Colour	Lower case	Reinforces ordinary, everyday, childlike tone of the story.
Style		
	Conversational Fairytale/fable	Establishes a more personal connection to the reader. Reinforces the simple, childlike state of Eddie's existence.
Sentence structure		
	Long sentences	Mimic the rambling sentence structure of conversational language.
Punctuation		
	Dashes	Give the sentences an improvised look. Used for asides or parallel comments.
Contrast		
	ordinary/ extraordinary Sophisticated (<i>'ideology'</i>)/ everyday language	These contrasts involve the reader more in the point of view of the author.
Irony		
	'this girl didn't want to tell him her name... but she was sweet enough to agree'	It is obvious early in the story that Eddie is hapless, and this is reinforced by the irony. Happiness is not as 'sweet' as Eddie thought. She is the opposite because she stood him up.
Symbolism		

5. Reflection

The first two questions are 'what' questions. They are asking me to respond to the content alone. I must remember not to discuss techniques here; otherwise, I will double up.

The use of the words 'how' and 'techniques' in the last two questions, respectively, indicate that they are 'how' type questions.

I must be careful to separate the techniques I will be discussing in each question. I can classify them according to those that specifically relate to creating 'sympathy' and those that generally 'involve the reader in the text'.

6. Plan

'What' questions

Explain why the bus driver 'would never open the door of the bus for people who were late'.

- The bus driver's 'ideology' (that the good of society should take precedence over the individual) governs his actions.
- His 'love of justice' and a 'simple arithmetic' underpins this ideology.
- His mathematical reasoning in support of this ideology is quite sound.

Explain how the bus driver's eventual change of mind connects with the title of the story.

- The title is a literal description of what happens in the story.
- It is ironic that someone who has not succeeded in being God plays god with the passengers.
- When the bus driver sees Eddie on his knees from 'way up in his driver's seat', he is reminded of his vow to be 'merciful and kind', if he achieved his ambition of becoming God. He then realises that he could be godlike simply by giving in to the impulse of mercy.

'How' questions

How does the author create sympathy for Eddie despite presenting him as 'lazy and wasted'?

- The simple childlike narration and descriptions enlist sympathy for Eddie because we associate childhood with sincerity and innocence.
- These associations excuse Eddie for his shortcomings.
- The irony of his pursuit of 'Happiness' (a false pursuit because 'Happiness' is not as sweet as Eddie thought) makes the reader feel pity for Eddie.
- The contrast between Eddie's actual existence and his dream is made greater through this irony.
- The result is that we simultaneously relate to his childlike thinking and see the futility of his aspirations.

What techniques does the author use to involve the reader in the text?

- The conversational or colloquial style helps form a personal relationship with the reader.
 - This is created through contractions ('didn't', 'they'd'), slang ('charley-horsed' and 'SOB') and long sentences that sound as if they are being improvised.
 - Combined with the fairytale flavour, this provides the reader with something familiar to relate to.
 - Also, the authorial intrusion 'the best thing would be to stop reading' arrests the readers' attention, maintaining their involvement in the story.
- The subtle irony and casual manner in which the story is told plus the exaggerated ('million trillion') and incongruous events (Eddie's 'condition') of the story provide humour, which provokes a positive response in the reader.
 - Note also how the repetition exaggerates the exactness of the bus driver's logic and adds another level of amusement.
- There are also a number of contrasts in this story that are used to involve the reader more in the point of view of the author (our actions and feelings tell us more about who we are).
 - The bus driver's ideology and Eddie's pursuit of 'Happiness' contrast with what they do and feel at the end of the story.
 - The sophisticated word 'ideology' contrasts with the colloquial vocabulary or style, as well as the childlike tone evident throughout the piece.

Comparing two broadsheet articles

Article 1

Who needs iPods? We've got hands!

Deaflympians show Melbourne commuters how to connect.

There's a game I like to play when stuck in traffic at lights. When I hear a tell-tale boom-ba-boom thud from a nearby car, or notice that a neighbouring driver is bopping in their seat or conducting an orchestra while waiting for red to become green, I turn off my own radio or tape then roll a window down to try to identify the music being played.

Sometimes I'm surprised: a businessman in a suit blasting Eminem; a Casey Donovan clone going classical; a bloke with tats in a labourer's singlet floating away with Pink Floyd. Occasionally I've been sprung while snooping. Eye contact is made, which prompts either an aggrieved nick-off gesture from the other driver or an embarrassed fumbling with the volume control. But usually these listeners are in a world of their own; their private vehicles are mobile musical bubbles.

Public transport is different. It would take a brave man in a suit to play Eminem on a boom-box at peak hour on the No. 57 tram. Technology has made this unnecessary anyway. Every month brings new methods of distraction, more and more ways to make public transport a private experience. So I probably shouldn't have been surprised to see that almost all of my fellow travellers on a city-bound train on the Sandringham line the other day seemed to be plugged in one way or another.

Without drawing too much attention to myself, I counted three people engaged in loud mobile-phone conversations, two people with the distinctive white leads to iPod ear-pieces snaking up their shirts, another couple of commuters sporting older-style headphones linked to portable CD-players, and one fellow – obviously a high achiever – simultaneously listening to something while tapping away at a hand-held electronic organiser.

Whenever a ring-tone was heard in the carriage there was a flurry of fumbling in handbags and cases. I felt awfully old-fashioned just reading a book.

Anyone pondering the global decline in newspaper sales might find part of the explanation in our trains and trams and buses.

There are simply many more ways than there were to spend time in transit. Why talk to a stranger pressed up against you, for example, when you can chat with a friend somewhere completely different by mobile phone? Most of us, at different times, have had to endure one half of a personal

conversation conducted at uncomfortably close quarters. Once, after listening for far too long to a traumatic break-up monologue ('I really like you but, you know, I just need some space of my own...') it was all I could do not to snatch the phone and say: 'Believe me – this guy is a loser. With NO sense at all of personal space.'

To do so, of course, would have caused outrage. This was, after all, a personal conversation. Very personal. Which left those of us in the vicinity wondering why it was being conducted in public. It can't be long, I suspect, before Melbourne's trains adopt the sort of enforced segregation that used to apply to smokers: commuters could choose between Mobile and No-Mobile carriages.

Perhaps, in time, the No-Mobile zones would become the friendliest places to be – Melbourne's transport equivalent of New York's park benches. By taking a seat in Central Park or Bryant Park, behind the New York Public Library, you declare yourself up for a chat. When I lived in New York for a few years in the late '80s, some of the best conversations occurred on these benches. Or on the much-maligned subway system. Then again, at that time half the population wasn't hiding between headphones.

After my trip to Flinders Street this week in the train carriage disguised as a portable electronics exhibition, I caught a tram along Swanston Street. We were passing the Burke and Wills statue when I started to pay attention to the people sitting close to me: five young visitors to the city, wearing shorts and T-shirts. No headphones, I noted. No mobiles. Then I saw the plastic accreditation tags around their necks. They were competitors and a coach from Russia, in town for the Deaflympics.

As we travelled the few blocks up to the State Library, I watched with increasing admiration as they chatted between themselves without a word. Using rapid-fire sign-language, smiles, gestures and nods they communicated with ease and alacrity. One of them, I picked up, was keen to see the crocodiles at the aquarium. If I'd had more time and less self-consciousness I might have tried harder to pass on some kind of greeting before I got off. Then again, they were doing just fine.

Without battery-powered distractions they seemed more open to new experiences than any city commuter I'd seen or heard in quite a while.

Source: Attwood, Alan, 2005. 'Who needs iPods? We've got hands!', *The Age*, 15 January. Accessed 26 February 2019 <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/who-needs-ipods-weve-got-hands-20050115-gdzdba.html>>

Article 2

All Thumbs, Without the Stigma

Since the beginning, humans have made big use of their thumbs – for grasping sticks, hitching rides, rating movies and so on. Now, for millions of people, the thumb has evolved into a preferred mode of 21st-century communication.

You can glimpse them in malls or school hallways, or even on the road, pumping a thumb (if not both) with speed and aplomb. They are text messagers, a rapidly growing breed who used the cellphone¹ to tap out and send short electronic missives. Cradling the phone in the palm, they make a mockery of the notion that a keyboard must be sizable – or that it takes a handful of fingers to hunt and peck.

Having initially boomed in Europe and Asia, text messaging has now invaded the United States with full force. In the first quarter of 2004, 2.6 billion text messages were sent on cellphones in the United States, an increase from 1.2 billion in the comparable period a year earlier, according to the Yankee Group, a market research firm.

In the process, reliance on the thumb to type has re-established its place in the hierarchy of the hand. 'The thumb is the new power digit,' said Edward Tenner, a science historian for the Smithsonian Institution who has spent time thinking about the interaction between hand and machine.

Dr Tenner, in 'Our Own Devices: The Past and Future of Body Technology' (Knopf, 2003), said that the thumb's role in operating keyboards became prominent 250 years ago with the advent of the musical keyboard, but then was diminished in stature by banishment to the space bar of the typewriter. Now, he said, it is 'enjoying a second renaissance'.

To be sure, Dr Tenner notes that research shows the thumb does half the overall work of the hand. But its typing prowess has emerged only with text messaging.

Source: Matt Ritzel, 2004. 'All Thumbs, Without the Stigma', The New York Times, 12 August. Accessed 26 February 2019 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/12/technology/all-thumbs-without-the-stigma.html>>.

As cellphones evolved into devices that fit in a palm, the thumb wound up in an opportune position for both dialing and text messaging. Many people use a single thumb to punch the keys while grasping the phone with the same hand. Others prefer a double-thumb method, while some – yes, it's true – resort to pecking away with the index finger of the hand not holding the phone.

Whatever the method, text messaging can still involve a workout, given that it typically takes multiple taps on a phone's number key to produce a desired letter.

Unsurprisingly, those who have taken most readily to the new medium have the fewest habits to unlearn: teenagers and young adults. About 50 percent of cellphone users in those age groups in the United States said they use text messaging regularly, twice the rate among all adults, according to the Yankee Group. The medium is also finding a foothold – er, thumbhold – among business people who find it an unobtrusive way to keep up with e-mail in meetings or on the go.

So important has the thumb become on gadgets in Japan, where text messaging caught on earlier, that a certain demographic group is referred to as *oyayubi sedai*, 'the thumb generation'. Dr Tenner pointed to findings that young Japanese, accustomed to using their thumbs to send messages are now using them to do other tasks – like pointing and ringing door bells – traditionally the realm of the index finger.

Elsewhere, adroitness of thumb has even manifested itself in contests of opposable dexterity. In June, text typing got a new world champion when SingTel, a Singapore telecommunications company, sponsored a contest to break the Guinness Book of World Records mark for text messaging – a distinction first recorded in 2001.

¹ Mobile phone.

Answer the questions and check your answers with the notes provided.

(a) **What does each text say about the social impact of mobile phones? (two paragraphs)**

Remember to always check the wording of questions to ensure that you are responding to what is actually being asked. Observe the following:

- The question specifically mentions ‘mobile phones’, not technology in general, which Attwood does refer to in his article (iPods, for example).
- You are not being asked to compare and contrast the two texts here, so you could devote a paragraph to each text.

Matt Richtel provides us with a quick historical survey of thumb use. He goes right back to the ‘beginning’ when humans used it for ‘grasping sticks’ and explains how it went in and out of prominence with the ‘advent of the musical keyboard’ and the typewriter. But these ups and downs are nothing in comparison to the current resurgence of thumb use due to the mobile phone, according to Richtel. The main reason he gives for the prominent use of the thumb is that mobile phones fit easily into the palm of the hand, therefore the thumb becomes the obvious digit to use.

Moreover, do not forget to mention how the habitual use of the thumb in this manner has had a flow-on effect to other areas in society. See the last two paragraphs for this. Alan Attwood, on the other hand, focuses more on how mobile phones have changed the way people relate to each other on public transport. He explains that their use isolates people making ‘public transport a private experience’.

When discussing what Attwood says about the social impact of mobile phones you will need to refer to the anecdotal evidence he provides, which forms the bulk of his article.

When answering this question, it would be wise to sprinkle a few quotations throughout your sentences in the manner I have demonstrated in the above paragraph. This will show the examiner that you have paid close attention to the details of the passage.

Remember not to quote great slabs of text in the hope that you might hit the mark with what you are saying (the shotgun approach).

(b) **How does the anecdote about the five young visitors at the end of Attwood’s article reflect the point he is making about electronic technology? (two or more paragraphs)**

To answer this question, you will need to explain what you think the point Attwood is trying to make about electronic technology in general (note: not just mobile phones).

Make sure that you make a connection between this and Attwood’s observations about the Deaflympians. Refer to the title in your answer. Note that only when we get to the last three paragraphs the meaning of the title begins to make sense. He delays satisfying our curiosity, and this has greater impact.

You might want to consider the following questions before formulating your response to this question:

- According to Attwood, have we gained anything or have we lost something with the explosion of new personal technologies?
- Do Attwood’s observations about the Deaflympians tell us something about what we might have lost?
- Finally, we sometimes call people who are deaf ‘disadvantaged’. Modern technologies are supposed to offer us advantages but deaf people cannot use them. Are deaf people then doubly disadvantaged or can you discern some irony here?

(c) **Compare the techniques used by the writers of the two texts to present their ideas about the effects of electronic technology. (three or more paragraphs)**

You have been asked to write three or more paragraphs for this question compared to the two paragraphs of the previous questions. Simple arithmetic will tell you that this question is worth more than the others, so allow yourself plenty of time to do this question justice.

When comparing the techniques, make sure that you use linking words and phrases to make this obvious to the examiner. Examples include ‘similarly’, ‘likewise’, ‘on the other hand’, ‘in contrast’ and so forth.

Furthermore, be aware that comparing the techniques means discussing the similarities and differences of the same techniques used by the authors as well the use of different techniques. Here are some tips on what to look for.

Techniques in common

- Both rely on reason and logic to make their point.
- Both use evidence to support their argument: but consider the type of support they enlist (Statistics? Quotations? Anecdotal?). They each rely heavily on a certain type of evidence to back up their arguments. One type of evidence is more objective while the other is more personal; both appeal to the reader in different ways.
- Consider, then, how balanced each writer is. Attwood has a more negative attitude toward technology than Richtel. How is this reflected in the type of evidence they provide?
- Both use connotative words to direct us towards their point of view. For example Richtel says that text messaging has ‘invaded the United States with full force’, which triggers associations in the reader’s mind. What does it suggest to you? Attwood describes ‘the distinctive white leads to iPod ear-pieces snaking up [the commuters’] shirts’. What does the word ‘snaking’ suggest to you? How does it reflect the writer’s point of view? Can you find any other connotative words to comment on?
- Moreover, given that both are written for broadsheet newspapers, the vocabulary is quite sophisticated (for example: ‘missives’ instead of ‘messages’ [Richtel] and ‘alacrity’ instead of ‘speed’ [Attwood]). Note, however, that Attwood adds colloquial language to the mix of his discussion (for example: ‘bloke with tats’) to enhance the anecdotal evidence he provides.
- Note also how both use humour, which provokes a positive response in the reader. Were you amused by anything in the passages? Is their humour different or the same?



A descriptive passage, or vignette

The Verb To Be

“The Verb To Be” was the name of an old bookshop. A murky place, due not to a lack of lighting but to all the nooks and crannies. A deep space with dark, worn floorboards and secluded niches. Books everywhere, spread on tables and upright in rows, thousands of silent observers on wooden shelves.

An ongoing battle between dust and the printed word at “The Verb To Be”, cardboard boxes overflowing with books, piles of volumes threatening to topple. Anarchy reigning supreme. Grandiose anarchy. A profusion of genres and titles. A joyous alchemy. It was here that people could drop by any day to procure their reading matter, highbrow or popular, arcane or classic, in exchange for a modest sum.

The kind of retreat that future generations will be hard put to imagine because nothing like it will exist anymore, because this blend of painstaking order and clutter, of reverence for books and stacking them in promiscuous heaps, will have gone up in smoke. Business on a small scale. Discreet custom, but a basic necessity. A bastion of text and print. Anodyne, but explosive all the same. Sleek stocks of flares, capable equally of lighting up life’s small details and illuminating vast swathes of existence. As the Chinese sage said: “The exquisite delight of discovering a sea of stories that one has not yet perused. Or acquiring the second volume of a work after falling in love with the first.”

Over the display counters hung several shaded lamps diffusing a soft glow, in which thirsty readers could stoop for a private sip of the refreshments on offer. Champagne, infernal elixirs, heady wines, liqueurs, plain red and pure water. The dimness at the far end of the bookshop always took some getting used to, but on some mornings the sun poured in so generously through the glazed door that it was impossible to resist going over there and opening a book in broad daylight, letting it warm the pages and show up the grain of the paper so that the whiteness would stretch out like a desert of signs. Leisure, light, literature: true happiness!

At the turn of the twenty-first century it was scornfully prophesied that places like this were on the way out. So much for the local bookshop! Done for, that type of trade... It was paper they held in contempt, and ink. The ink used for writing as well as printing: messy, antiquated practices. But they also disdained the little repositories of thoughts, visions, words unfurling page after

page while remaining singularly compact, self-contained, just right for slipping into your pocket, taking on a journey and opening, never mind where, never mind when. To be read. Devoured. Leafed through. No electricity, no screens. “Guess where I’m reading the *Treatise on the Improvement of Understanding*, or the *Stanzas of Agrippa d’Aubigné!*” On a train. In the cleft of a rock at the seaside. In bed. In a crowd. On the lavatory. Lying in a bubble bath. In the beam of a head torch at the foot of a sand dune, in the wind.

There is a warmth about all those books: bought in bookshops, treasured, given away as presents, abandoned to their own recondite fates. Torn, yellowed, forgotten, rediscovered. Reams of great texts... “Habent sua fata libelli.”¹

One glimpse of a cover, plain or illustrated, and Étienne Volland² can place it instantaneously: publisher, approximate date of publication, series, title, author, but presently his exceptional memory overloads his mind with long quotes, passages of varying lengths which he has retained since he first read the work. Indeed, Volland will recognise any book, even if read a very long time ago, by the crystalline murmur starting up in his head, burbling, streaming, brimming over and sometimes even setting his lips in silent motion.

Often, he can visualise the exact printed text lodged at the back of his mind. An amazing memory. Memory for nothing but the words of bookseller Volland who harbours, in the depths of his frame, the meat of millions of words once ingested, chewed, rechewed, ruminated, still in pristine condition, in a never-tiring cycle of delight. A scene in a novel comes back to him in every detail, complete with the corresponding page layout, typeface, smell of glue and paper, and even the blank spaces, the punctuation, the word-break at the end of a line, with part of it hanging on by a hyphen and the balance forlornly embarking on the next line. Thus books are preserved in the expanses of his memory as they are in the stories he told.

Book stories. Volland the bookseller liked telling the story of the man who was held hostage for years by a group of politico-religious fanatics in the Middle East and who, by the most extraordinary stroke of luck, discovered a copy of *War and Peace* volume II hidden in a corner of his squalid cell. Mangled and mildewed, but translated into his own language. A book in no better shape than he was. From then on something changed

for him. Everything changed. An immense solace came to him from the scores of pages spilling from between the covers, and his taste for life was restored.

Vollard also told the story of the woman condemned to total darkness in a Soviet jail, who kept in her head a Shakespeare play she had committed to memory as a girl. Sightless, in the solitary confinement that induces madness, she recited *King Lear* to herself in English, from start to finish. A pinpoint of light gathered in her gloom. She could see the book, she could see the words. So she read, turning the pages in her mind's eye. She saw it so clearly, the book she had bought in a little shop when she was a student, that she began to translate it into Russian, in the dark, just for her, no other reason, just a way of keeping the embers of humanity alive in the face of all oppression. She turned the pages of her old student's copy in the course of an extremely vivid hallucination, trawling her memory for the exact

word, the cadence, the cohesion, she passed her time translating, with neither ink nor paper, as she waited for death.

Étienne Vollard spent most of his time sitting in the back, a giant spider in the centre of his web. From the old flat where he lived immediately above "The Verb to Be" he came down daily to sell his books. Every day up until the accident, that is, Vollard the bookseller came down the stairs to keep vigil by the sickbed of Literature. Her breathing was laboured. She was feverish. But still breathing.

For a long time he had known how to read the signs and welcome new developments, but nowadays, he said, things do not change the way they used to, there is just a parody of change that changes nothing. Even so, he never gave up mining the avalanches of textual merchandise, the plethora of fly-by-nights paradoxically named "books", the jostling crowd of self-proclaimed writers, in the hope of extracting a gem.

Source: Adapted from Pierre Peju, 2006. *The Girl from the Chartreuse* (translated by Ina Rilke), Vintage Books, London, pp. 46, 49-52.

1 *Books have their own fate.*

2 *The bookshop's owner.*

Questions

- What does *The Verb To Be* offer its customers? (*one paragraph*)
- Why does the author think that 'Literature' is on its 'sickbed'? (*one paragraph*)
- What links does the author make between the shop and its owner, Vollard? (*one or two paragraphs*)
- In what ways does the author communicate the power of literature? (*two or more paragraphs*)

Responding

Firstly it is important to recognise what it is you are reading, or perhaps what it is not. It is not a newspaper article, or a short story, but rather an extract from a novel. Technically it can be classed as a vignette, or short literary sketch. As such it contains features typical of the text type: figurative language (particularly similes and metaphors) and prominent use of imagery (see page 18 of this workbook). Tone and mood also feature in such texts to present the point of view. This will help you to know the nature of the beast and how best to tackle it. So with this in mind let's take a look at the questions. Take note of the instructions in italics which give an indication of how many paragraphs to write for each question.

What does *The Verb To Be* offer its customers?

Note the way phrases and words are incorporated into sentences of my own construction. See page 18.

Apart from the 'reading matter' which can be purchased for a 'modest sum' and access to the vast knowledge of Vollard, the shop also presents as a 'kind of retreat' which is 'secluded' with many 'nooks and crannies'. It is a place that offers pleasure for the senses and sustenance for both the body and the soul. The far end is 'impossible to resist' because of the sun pouring in to 'warm the pages'. The idea of physical nourishment is enhanced by the idea that books in this shop can be 'devoured'; they are 'refreshments ... Champagne, infernal elixirs, heady wines, liqueurs, plain red and pure water'. Vollard himself is said to have 'ingested' the 'meat of millions of words'. These books are a part of the life continuous with that of the customers. They

are 'flares, capable equally of lighting up life's small details and illuminating vast swathes of existence'. They are also a 'bastion' against the excesses of human cruelty capable of 'keeping the embers of humanity alive in the face of all oppression'.

Why does the author think that 'Literature' is on its 'sickbed'?

Literature is considered to be in peril because 'places like this' are under threat from an unidentified other associated with 'electricity' and 'screens' that holds paper and ink 'in contempt' and considers them to be 'messy, antiquated practices'. Local bookshops 'on a small scale' have been condemned to extinction because they are no longer the trend or feasible. This unidentified other 'disdain[s]' these bookshops for their 'repositories of thoughts' and 'visions'. Furthermore, the books in the piece are described as deteriorating: battling against 'dust' with 'piles threatening to topple'. They are 'torn, yellowed, forgotten' and 'left to their own fate', further reinforcing the sombre mood of impending extinction. But, as the author points out, Literature is 'still breathing'. This suggests that it will possibly endure despite the advances of modern technology with its 'avalanches of textual merchandise' through which Vollard subversively scavenges in 'the hope of extracting a gem'. The main point of the piece is that people will always feel and so, as long as books appeal to the senses and emotions, books will endure.

What links does the author make between the shop and its owner, Vollard?

Connections between the owner and his shop are primarily made through the metaphor of Vollard as 'a giant spider in the centre of his web' in a place that is 'murky' and 'secluded' – much like a place a spider would inhabit. Like a spider, Vollard, who 'lived immediately above it', remains vigilant and controls every part of his bookshop. He metaphorically 'ingests' the books in his shop and can 'recognise any book' by 'one glimpse' and has 'an amazing memory'. Similar to the way that a spider knows its web, Vollard 'can visualise the exact printed text lodged at the back of his mind'. Literature, his web, sustains him as much as it sustains his customers. Moreover, the association of spiders with venom could further reinforce the idea that literature retains a potency that empowers it.

In what ways does the author communicate the power of literature?

Take particular note of what the question is asking.

You are required to discuss the techniques that reinforce the power of literature, not just any techniques.

The title of the piece (and the shop), 'The Verb to Be', is a play on words, alluding to Hamlet, and suggests life and continuity. This idea that literature will endure or continue is reinforced by other more direct intertextual references, such as *War and Peace* and *King Lear*, and their association with the stories of survival of the hostage and the prisoner described on the second page. These anecdotes act as evidence of the power of literature to sustain people in even the most dire of human circumstances. The hostage gained 'immense solace' from the copy of *War and Peace* and the prisoner was able to 'keep the embers of humanity alive' though reciting *King Lear*.

This power, and its consequent ability to endure because of its necessity for human function and survival, is further reinforced by the metaphors of consumption throughout the piece ('devouring'). Customers have a 'private sip' and Vollard 'ingested' and 'chewed' the words in the books. Moreover, images of warmth, vital for human survival, are seen throughout the piece: 'lighting', 'glow', 'sun pour[ing]', 'embers of humanity'. Humans need sustenance to survive, and literature, according to the piece, can provide it. Conversely, through personification (Literature on its 'sickbed') the author manages to highlight the importance of literature: if literature doesn't survive, then humans could meet the same peril. That literature has power and will survive as long as humans are alive is summed up best in the alliterative sentence concluding the fourth paragraph: 'Leisure, light, literature: true happiness!'

The metaphor of a 'battle' and the idea that Literature is enduring against the odds also reinforces the strength of Literature. Despite its fragility and disorder, its anarchic and 'promiscuous' state, literature still survives as a 'bastion' and is 'explosive' against its 'scornfully prophesised' doom by an apparently superior opponent. The piece cleverly enlists the reader on the side of literature through the lush imagery outlined above. The reader can almost feel the 'glow' of the 'embers', sunlight and 'shaded lamps'. The reader can feel reverence for literature through the sophisticated language exhibited throughout the piece, such as adjectives and nouns typically associated with literary texts: 'grandiose', 'arcane', 'recondite'. Moreover the mention of revered texts (*Treatise on the Improvement of Understanding, or the Stanzas of Agrippa d'Aubigné*) in addition to the Latin quotation further reinforces the reverence and power of literature. The fact that Latin is one of the oldest languages and has endured despite it not being spoken any more bears testament to the ability of literature to endure.

Text 1

Comparing three texts: Advertisement, story and poem



**THINK
OUTSIDE
THE
CAGE**

Celebrate National Bird Day!¹ January 5, 2009
www.NationalBirdDay.com

Each year, millions of exotic birds are captured from the wild or produced in captivity for commercial profit or human amusement, only to languish in conditions that fail to meet these animals' instinctive behavioural and physical needs. As a result, many birds lead miserable lives.

National Bird Day (January 5) is a day to appreciate our own native wild birds

flying free outside our windows, and a day to reflect on how we treat the native birds of other countries. National Bird Day is also a time to commit to improving the lives of birds in captivity and to support efforts aimed at protecting birds in the wild.



¹ National Bird Day is an event promoted in the United States of America

Source: Adapted from Born Free USA united with Animal Protection Institute, www.nationalbirdday.com

Note that the background of the image in the original advertisement is green.

Text 2

The Image of the Lost Soul

There were a number of carved stone figures placed at intervals along the old Cathedral; some of them represented angels, others kings and bishops, and nearly all were in attitudes of pious exaltation and composure. But one figure, low down on the cold north side of the building, had neither crown, mitre, [nor] nimbus, and its face was hard and bitter and downcast; it must be a demon, declared the fat blue pigeons that roosted and sunned themselves all day on the ledges of the parapet; but the old belfry jackdaw, who was an authority on ecclesiastical architecture, said it was a lost soul. And there the matter rested.

One autumn day there fluttered on to the Cathedral roof a slender, sweet-voiced bird that had wandered away from the bare fields and thinning hedgerows in search of a winter roosting-place. It tried to rest its tired feet under the shade of a great angel-wing or to nestle in the sculptured folds of a kingly robe, but the fat pigeons hustled it away from wherever it settled, and the noisy sparrow-folk drove it off the ledges. No respectable bird sang with so much feeling, they cheeped one to another, and the wanderer had to move on.

Only the effigy of the Lost Soul offered a place of refuge. The pigeons did not consider it safe to perch on a projection that leaned so much out of the perpendicular, and was, besides, too much in the shadow. The figure did not cross its hands in the pious attitude of the other graven dignitaries, but its arms were folded as in defiance and their angle made a snug resting-place for the little bird. Every evening it crept trustfully into its corner against the stone breast of the image, and the darkling eyes seemed to keep watch over its slumbers. The lonely bird grew to love its lonely protector, and during the day it would sit from time to time on some rainshoot or other abutment and trill forth its sweetest music in grateful thanks for its nightly shelter. And, it may have been the work of wind and weather, or some other influence, but the wild drawn face seemed gradually to lose some of its hardness and unhappiness. Every day, through the long monotonous hours, the song of his little guest would come up in snatches to the lonely watcher, and at evening, when the vesper-bell was ringing and the great grey bats slid out of their hiding-places in the belfry roof, the bright-eyed bird would return, twitter a few sleepy notes, and nestle into the arms that were waiting for him. Those were happy days for the Dark Image. Only the great bell of the Cathedral rang out daily its mocking message, "After joy ... sorrow."****

The folk in the verger's lodge noticed a little brown bird flitting about the Cathedral precincts, and admired its beautiful singing. "But it is a pity," said they, "that all that warbling should be lost and wasted far out of hearing up on the parapet." They were poor, but they understood the principles of political economy. So they caught the bird and put it in a wicker cage outside the lodge door.

That night the little songster was missing from its accustomed haunt, and the Dark Image knew more than ever the bitterness of loneliness. Perhaps his little friend had been killed by a prowling cat or hurt by a stone. Perhaps ... perhaps he had flown elsewhere. But when morning came there floated up to him, through the noise and bustle of the Cathedral world, a faint heart-aching message from the prisoner in the wicker cage far below. And every day, at high noon, when the fat pigeons were stupefied into silence after their midday meal and the sparrows were washing themselves in the street-puddles, the song of the little bird came up to the parapets – a song of hunger and longing and hopelessness, a cry that could never be answered.

The pigeons remarked, between mealtimes, that the figure leaned forward more than ever out of the perpendicular.

One day no song came up from the little wicker cage. It was the coldest day of the winter, and the pigeons and sparrows on the Cathedral roof looked anxiously on all sides for the scraps of food which they were dependent on in hard weather.

"Have the lodge-folk thrown out anything on to the dust-heap?" inquired one pigeon of another which was peering over the edge of the north parapet.

"Only a little dead bird," was the answer.

There was a crackling sound in the night on the Cathedral roof and a noise as of falling masonry. The belfry jackdaw said the frost was affecting the fabric, and as he had experienced many frosts it must have been so. In the morning it was seen that the Figure of the Lost Soul had toppled from its cornice and lay now in a broken mass on the dust-heap outside the verger's lodge.

"It is just as well," cooed the fat pigeons, after they had peered at the matter for some minutes; "now we shall have a nice angel put up there. Certainly they will put an angel there."

"After joy ... sorrow," rang out the great bell.

Source: H. H. Munro, 1982. *The Complete Works of Saki*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, pp. 523–5.

Text 3

Caged Bird

A free bird leaps
 on the back of the wind
 and floats downstream
 till the current ends
 and dips his wing
 in the orange sun rays
 and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
 down his narrow cage
 can seldom see through
 his bars of rage
 his wings are clipped and
 his feet are tied
 so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
 with a fearful trill
 of things unknown
 but longed for still
 and his tune is heard
 on the distant hill
 for the caged bird
 sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
 and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
 and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn
 and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
 his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
 his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
 so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
 with a fearful trill
 of things unknown
 but longed for still
 and his tune is heard
 on the distant hill
 for the caged bird
 sings of freedom.

Source: Maya Angelou, 1983. *Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?*, Random House, New York, pp.16–17.

Questions

- Compare the plights of the birds in the three texts. (*one or two paragraphs*)
- How do the written and visual features of Text 1 direct the reader to 'think outside the cage'? (*two paragraphs*)
- Compare the ways that the authors of Texts 2 and 3 try to enlist sympathy for the birds that suffer. (*three or more paragraphs*)

Mark yourself

Use the following procedure to complete and mark your own work.

Firstly, make sure that you

- revise the text types from page 41 and be on the alert for the techniques
- use the worksheet on page 37 as a guide to assist your thinking.

Before you begin

- read the questions beforehand
- determine specifically what the questions are asking.

While you are reading

- look up any unfamiliar words (especially those in the questions)
- identify the types of texts you are reading (revise from page 41)
- mark the texts where the questions are being answered.

Before answering

- make notes on the main points you intend to discuss for each question
- for (b) and (c) specify the techniques you plan to discuss
- make sure you spend the right amount of time on each question (be guided by the word limits in italics).

After answering

- wait a day before marking your work
- reread the texts
- use the following guide to mark your own work.

Question (a)

This question is asking for you to compare the ‘plights’ of the birds in the three texts. Comparing should always involve pointing out the similarities and differences.

Did you look up the word ‘plight’? If you did you would know to focus on the condition, state or situation the birds are in, both physical and emotional.

Did you discuss the following?

All three texts mention birds that are caged or in captivity.

- The birds in Text 1 are caged.
- The bird in Text 2 is free then caged.
- In Text 3 a comparison is drawn between a free bird and a caged bird.

Being free or captive results in an emotional state.

- In Text 1 the birds are ‘miserable’.
- In Text 2 the bird, when captive, sings ‘a song of hunger and longing and hopelessness’ compared to before when it would ‘trill forth its sweetest music’.
- In Text 3 the caged bird is ‘fearful’ and ‘shouts on a nightmare scream’ while the free bird enjoys its flight and ‘can name the sky his own’.

Note that, in Texts 2 and 3, the caged birds express their emotional state in song.

Tick where you have mentioned the above.

Question (b)

Observe that you are required to discuss those elements that persuade the reader to ‘think outside the cage’

Did you consider both the written and visual elements and the way that they work together?

Did you notice some of the most obvious words and images?

The picture of the bird about to take flight is juxtaposed against the play on words: ‘Think outside the cage’.

Notice how the words in capitals are restricted by the boundary of the photograph and are pushing to be released. This is a visual representation of, and allusion to, the saying ‘think outside the square’.

Did you notice the predominance of the colour green in the picture? We normally associate green with nature. The bird is seen enjoying its natural environment which encourages readers to see that captivity is wrong.

As with most advertisements there are a number of imperatives throughout the text. Apart from 'Think outside the cage', did you notice 'Celebrate National Bird Day' and 'Keep wildlife in the wild'?

When reading the smaller text did you notice the evidence in the first paragraph ('millions of exotic birds are captured') and the emotive language ('miserable lives') used to persuade the reader to support the freedom of birds?

Did you also notice the use of inclusive pronouns ('we', 'our') used to persuade the reader that everyone benefits from freeing birds from their cages.

The 'Born Free' logo could also be commented on because of its associations with the famous film about freeing lions.

Question (c)

Short stories (Text 2) and poems (Text 3) rely heavily on traditional literary devices so you will expect to find these in the two texts.

Did you focus on the techniques that 'evoked sympathy for the birds that suffer'?

Did you discuss both the similarities and differences when you compared the techniques of the two texts?

Did you specify the techniques as follows?

Contrast

Before and after being caged (Text 2) and between the free and caged bird (Text 3).

Remember that contrast works to highlight one of the contrasting pairs (in this case the caged bird and the bird that suffers).

In the story a contrast can be seen in the two halves of the story (divided by the three asterisks).

In the poem the contrast is evident through the stanzas.

Here you will note that both texts connect the caged bird to images of death ('grave of dreams') and the free bird to images of life, reinforcing the contrast.

Personification

The omniscient voice of the two texts allows the reader to enter into the mind of the birds and feel empathy for them. Text 2 personifies a 'carved stone figure' which might be a bit of a stretch for some readers but anything that is humanised arouses sympathy. The reader is meant to identify with the sympathy this figure has for the bird. In the poem there is no equivalent entity that feels sorry for the caged bird: it suffers on its own.

Note that direct speech enhances the personification in Text 2. This is not evident in Text 3.

The **titles** in both texts serve to set the mood of the texts ('lost' and 'caged')

Repetition

This is used extensively in both texts to reinforce the main ideas in the texts. Note the repetition of the third stanza in the poem and key phrases, such as 'After joy ... sorrow' in the short story.

Rhyme

Did you comment on the different text types? One is a short story and the other a poem.

This is significant because one of the main features of a poem is rhyme and its ability to create powerful connections ('dream' and 'scream', and 'cage' and 'rage').

The above, while not exhaustive, presents a fairly comprehensive list of features that you could have noticed; however, you will not be expected to comment on everything in the examination.

Determine your grade

If you managed to discuss most of the points on pages 64 and 65 (knowledge and understanding), determine the degree to which you discussed them (analysis) and the manner in which you discussed them (application).

To assist in this, address the following questions:

- For question (a) was your discussion of the plights of the birds detailed?
- For the remaining questions was your identification of the authors' stylistic features and language techniques wide ranging?
- Was your analysis of the similarities and differences and the ways in which the techniques functioned perceptive?
- Was your use of evidence detailed and incorporated fluently into sentences of your own construction? (See **Managing quotations** on page 47.)
- Was your expression, overall, fluent and precise?

If so, then you can award yourself an 'A'

If not, try and determine how far off the pace you are.

Address the following questions to help identify which grade band you might be sitting in.

Did you discuss a lot of the points and present a clear and confident analysis, using quotations in a fairly coherent manner?

If so, award yourself a B.

Did you discuss only a limited number of the points above and struggle a bit to answer the last two questions?

If so, award yourself a C or lower.

The best thing is to show your work to your teacher and ask how you can work towards bringing it up to the highest level.

Comparing a magazine article and a car review

Read the following texts carefully and answer all parts of the question, (a), (b), (c), and (d).

Text 1

People's Limousine

by Jeremy Clarkson

Now that Nissan and Rover are making some half-decent cars, the motoring headline writers have turned their big guns on Ford who, it is said, wouldn't know what a decent car was even if one jumped out of some bracken and ate the chairman's leg.

Not unreasonably, car buffs are asking how on earth, after spending the best part of a billion quid on it, Ford managed to get the new Escort so hopelessly wrong.

This can be answered very simply indeed. It looks like Ford blundered and built a car that people want.

Instead of getting qualified engineers to sit around a conference table hammering out what is feasible in a family car these days and what is not, they got a whole load of students to mill about in High Wycombe, doing market research.

It's a fairly safe bet that if BMW had used such a technique, the Z1 would be five times faster and ten times less fun. When asked what they would like to see in a car, people are not in the habit of asking for drop-down doors.

However, Ford felt Mr Average's opinions were important enough and *did* ask what features he would like to see on his next Eurobox. They then compounded the mistake by actually designing the car around these findings and now make no secret of the fact that appearance, quality and price were cited as the most important issues.

Just 14 per cent of those questioned reckoned that performance was important, while handling, according to a spokesman, either wasn't a consideration or, if it was, didn't interest anyone enough even to register on the bar chart.

Irrespective of what may or may not have been technically possible in a car like the Escort, it seems Ford's besuited marketeers went back to its engineers with these findings and told them to design a new car around the results. This means we now have a reasonably attractive, well-priced and quite nicely built car that doesn't handle [or perform].

And now, of course, the headline writers are jumping up and down, foaming at the mouth and saying that Ford should have broken the law of averages and given us more. A lot more.

The trouble is that people outside of motoring magazines will never know just how horrid the Escort is because (a) they will never drive a rival and (b) even if they did, they'd not spot the differences.

People, remember, don't care about performance and handling.

I have a Zanussi fridge. I do not know whether it has any CFCs in its engine. I do not know how many horsepower its motor develops and, even if I did, I wouldn't know whether that was a lot or not. I do not know if the light that comes on is ellipsoidal or even if it goes off when the door is shut. I do not know whether it is made out of aluminium or carbon fibre and, more than that, I do not care.

If I were to be stopped tomorrow by a student with a clipboard and asked what features I would most like to see on the fridge of tomorrow I would tell him that it should keep my milk from becoming cheese, that it should fit under the work surface and that there should be enough room inside for 24 tins of Sapporo¹.

I do not know if it would be possible to have a solar-powered titanium job that could double up as a food blender cum orange squeezer so I would therefore not talk to the market researcher of such things. Similarly, a man in the street would not know of radar parking aids or variable valve-timing technology and, as a result, he would not be able to tell Ford's market researcher that he wanted both of them on his next Escort.

Even though it might have been possible for such items to have been engineered in, Ford has obviously made them very low priorities, concentrating instead on value, appearance and quality: things people think the people want.

Of course, people want these things but they want a whole lot more besides. It's just that they don't know what they want until someone gives it to them. My grandfather never used to sit around wishing that he could have a remote-control television set because, in his day, such whizzkiddery was the preserve of sci-fi writers.

You can't want what you don't know exists. I think Sinead O'Connor had some sort of anarchistic viewpoint in mind when she eloquently entitled her album, 'I do not want what I have not got' but the sentiment holds water on a commercial basis too.

It's fair enough to target existing Escort drivers, asking them what features of their current car are annoying. It is fair enough to act speedily on information received, but it is entirely irresponsible to let ordinary members of the public decide what the cars of tomorrow should be like.

¹ Sapporo — Japanese beer

I can't think of one great breakthrough that has been achieved through market research. Isaac Newton didn't use a single clipboard to find out if we'd like gravity or not. Alexander Fleming didn't commission MORI² to see if we all needed penicillin.

And NOP³ had nothing whatsoever to do with the theory of relativity. Questioning people in the street is only useful if you want to compose a silly article in a silly women's magazine about underarm deodorant.

Source: Adapted from Jeremy Clarkson, 2004. *Clarkson on Cars*, Penguin Books, London, pp. 130–3.

2 MORI and 3 NOP — market research companies

Text 2



2010 **Kia Forte**

suitable for:

5 SEATS

2 ROWS

2 LATCH CONNECTORS

IN DIAPERS

IN SCHOOL

TEENS

Price range **\$13,695** to **\$17,495**

Forte is a Good Car, But Lacks Star Quality

2010 KIA FORTE SX

TEST DROVE 4/1/10–11/1/10

REVIEWED BY **SARA LACEY**

When I'm watching "American Idol," I often wonder how many potential contestants who try out for the show are good, but not great. If you heard them singing at your school or church you'd probably think, "Dang, they're good!" In Hollywood, however, they're not impressive enough to stand out in the crowd. These people are like the 2010 Kia Forte. The Forte is a good car. But, in the words of "Idol" judge Simon Cowell, it risks being forgettable.

Can this car be a winner? Sometimes, with the right blend of charisma, it can, but this segment of cars rarely pulls off a Kelly Clarkson,* especially in the family category.

My test car, the top-of-the-line SX, had a sport-tuned suspension. I was excited to try it out, but it didn't thrill me. This isn't a car I'm going to be racing around a track, and for the kind of everyday driving I do, the Forte does just fine. If I were [an Idol judge] I'd say, let's give it a chance! Is the Forte goin' to Hollywood?

Exterior

Like a perky "Idol" contestant, the Forte SX looked promising. The exterior is modern

looking and sports a nice grille and fog lights. The 17-inch wheels are sporty and fun, and there are relatively few cheap-looking plastic accents. The Forte really does look the part of a fun, inexpensive car that young up-and-comers might like to drive.

Even better, the Forte looks good from the back (and if you think that doesn't matter, just ask a woman who's buying jeans). The taillights and sculpted trunk are so attractive that the Forte appears to be a fancier, more upscale car from the rear. That being said, it doesn't beat you over the head with its glitziness. There are no superficial accessories here, folks. It just looks good and doesn't need all kinds of chrome and special paint to divert your attention.

The Forte's doors were easy for my kids, ages 5 and 7, to open and close [but] you may want to watch your head when you're getting the kids into their child-safety seats, as I bonked mine a few times on the door frame. I guess that's an occupational hazard of owning a sedan.

SENSE AND STYLE

Family Friendly (Not Really, Fair, Great, Excellent): Fair

Fun-Factor (None, Some, Good Times, Groove-On): Some

Interior

The interior is really the best part of this car. It's the Forte's forte! (Sorry, I couldn't resist.)

The leather-trimmed seats are comfortable and heated, which made me happy. Granted, heated leather seats are optional and will cost you \$1,000, but when the base price is \$17,495, an extra \$1,000 seems worth it.

There's a good balance of silver- and black-colored plastic trim. All the dials and gauges were well laid out and easy to read. This is a car that has everything you want and nothing you don't. The center console had room for a small bag of wipes and a few other items, and the top shelf can house lip balms or cell phones. Actually, you'd probably put your cell phone on the cool shelf above the gearshift. It's a flat space with a grippy bottom and two 12-volt outlets, an MP3 jack and a USB input right in front of it. Nice space planning, Kia!

In the backseat, the kids had plenty of legroom, even with my husband's seat pushed all the way back. The cupholders are located in the center armrest, which is a kid-friendly position and much appreciated by this mom.

The Forte's trunk is huge, and 60/40-split backseat folds down easily to accommodate longer items. I'm not sure the Forte's the next "American Idol," but based on the interior, this Kia's definitely going to Hollywood!

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT COUNT

Storage Compartments (Puny, Fair, Ample, Galore): Fair

Cargo/Trunk Space (Puny, Fair, Ample, Galore): Ample

Safety

The Forte offers enough room in the second row to fit a rear-facing child-safety seat, and its Latch connectors are out in the open and easy to use. There's no digging between seat cushions to use them. The tether anchors were easy to find, too. My kids' booster seats fit well, too. However, the backseat's seat belt receptors are floppy, which can frustrate younger kids who are just learning how to buckle up by themselves.

The Forte comes with standard anti-lock brakes, an electronic stability system and traction control.

Kia packed the Forte with dual-stage front-impact airbags, side-impact airbags for the front row and side curtain airbags for both rows. Nice.

FAMILY LIFESTAGE

In Diapers: The second row is roomy enough to fit a rear-facing child-safety seat.

In School: Kids will also appreciate the backseat legroom and the easy-to-reach cup-holders.

Teens: This is good first-car material here, folks.

Source: Adapted from www.motherproof.com

Questions

You must answer **all** parts of this question.

- For what reasons does Clarkson condemn Ford for getting 'the new Escort so hopelessly wrong'? (*one paragraph*)
- Why does Lacey consider that the Forte 'risks being forgettable'? (*one paragraph*)
- Contrast the authors' suggestions about what makes a good car. (*one or more paragraphs*)
- Compare the techniques used by the two authors to convince the reader of their points of view. (*three or more paragraphs*)

Using the Critical Reading analysis worksheet for two texts

Here's what I thought. What did you think?

Text 1

Title: People's Limousine

Author: Jeremy Clarkson

Genre: Opinion column

Purpose/Audience: Evaluate cars for car buffs, mainly men

Text 2

Title: 'Kia Forte' review

Author: Sara Lacey

Genre: Car review

Purpose/Audience: Evaluate cars for prospective buyers, namely mothers

1. Impressions

Text 1: As a viewer of *Top Gear* I was able to relate immediately to Jeremy Clarkson's humour. I had a clear image of him in my mind and could almost hear him speaking to me.

Text 2: I soon recognised that I was not the target audience and felt a bit left out ('room for a small bag of wipes'). I lost interest fairly quickly as this is not the sort of car I would drive.

2. What are the authors saying?

Clarkson thinks that the opinions of people who don't know anything about cars shouldn't be used in designing cars. They simply don't know what they want. Only engineers do.

Lacey likes the car and points out a lot of its features that would suit a mother with young children but she is not overly impressed.

The authors' point of view in one sentence:

Text 1: People in the street cannot decide on the cars of tomorrow, only engineers can.

Text 2: The Kia Forte is a good car but 'it risks being forgettable'.

3. Checking assumptions

Text 1 I must be careful to remain objective as Clarkson's humour is very engaging and persuasive. I enjoy his take on cars.

Text 2 I must be careful about my feelings of not being the target audience as I am expected to comment objectively on the review.

4. Observations – Text 1

Technique	Example	Function in text
Reader address:		
Objective First person Inclusive Direct	'I can't think of one'	Create personal relationship
Appeal to emotions:		
Tone Imagery Humour Analogy Connotative words	'ate chairman's leg' Zanussi fridge / Sinead	Get reader onside Make abstract idea concrete
Appeal to reason:		
Evidence Questions Balance Repetition	Newton / Fleming How Ford got it wrong	Back up point of view Intrigue reader
Wordplay:		
Pun Alliteration Rhyme Allusion		
Visual elements:		
Title Subheadings Pictures and graphics Colour		
Style		
	Witty and humorous	Entertains more than informs
Sentence structure		
	Long and rambling	Thick helpings of humour intended to get reader onside
Punctuation		
Contrast		
	Experts and marketeers	Highlights the absurdity of asking the person in the street.
Irony		
Symbolism		

4. Observations – Text 2

Technique	Example	Function in Text
Reader address:		
Objective		
First person	'When I'm watching ..'	personal connection ('my kids')
Inclusive		
Direct	'you think that doesn't'	Singles out reader
Appeal to emotions:		
Tone		
Imagery		
Humour	'woman... buys jeans'	Gets reader onside
Analogy	Car / Idol contestant	Something easy to relate to
Connotative words		
Appeal to reason:		
Evidence	'nice grille' 'fog lights'	Back up point
Questions	Can this be a winner?	Causes reader to reflect
Balance		
Repetition		
Wordplay:		
Pun		
Alliteration		
Rhyme		
Allusion		
Visual elements:		
Title		
Subheadings	Feature ratings	Appeals to casual reader
Pictures and graphics		
Colour		
Style		
Sentence structure		
Punctuation		
Contrast		
Irony		
Symbolism		

5. Reflection

Both pieces have a clear target audience and make assumptions about their readers. The target audiences are quite contrasting, so I must make sure I emphasise this in my responses. For question (c) I will have to infer what the authors think makes a good car from the texts because they do not explicitly state it. For question (d) I must remember that comparing means pointing out the similarities and differences.

6. Plan

'What' questions

- (a) For what reasons does Clarkson condemn Ford for getting 'the new Escort so hopelessly wrong'?
- Clarkson believes the process in designing the Escort is flawed.
 - The general public don't know what they want ('it looks like Ford blundered and built a car that people want').
 - Market research took priority over engineering which was foolish, leading to an average car.
 - Escort's qualities are based on 'appearance, quality and price', not 'performance and handling'.
- (b) Why does Lacey consider that the Forte 'risks being forgettable'?
- Unlike Clarkson, Lacey does not condemn the Forte, she just thinks it's not a top quality car.
 - The Forte is a good car but it 'risks being forgettable' because it doesn't have 'star quality'.
 - In her mind it is good but not great, it is, after all, a family car.
 - The car is not 'glitzy', which makes it ordinary.
 - She also points out that it is a good first car for teens, which implies that it is nothing special.
 - This is reinforced by the average ratings at the end of each section: 'fair' and 'some'.
 - The Forte is 'not impressive enough to stand out in the crowd', therefore risks being forgettable.
- (c) Contrast the authors' suggestions about what makes a good car.
- Lacey focuses on the family-friendly features of the car.
 - Clarkson dislikes average and focuses on performance and handling, which he believes should take advantage of technology.
 - Clarkson considers the process of designing a new car, whereas Lacey looks at the end result.
 - Lacey looks at the features from a mother's point of view, which affects her views on what makes a good car. Her review is dominated by discussion of interior ('legroom') and safety ('booster seats fit well'). She states: 'for the kind of everyday driving I do, the Forte does just fine.'
 - Clarkson is more concerned with the engineering aspects and pushing the limits with what is 'technically possible'. For Clarkson creativity and performance are of primary importance.
 - Lacey doesn't see these as important: safety, economy and appearance are her priorities.
 - Audience is very gendered for both texts. Clarkson is aggressively male. He reiterates his point in the final paragraph by referring to writing 'a silly article in a silly women's magazine'.

6. Plan (continued)

'How' questions (see 'Observations')

- (d) Compare the techniques used by the two authors to convince the reader of their points of view.
- Titles provide immediate insight into writers' points of view.
 - Contrasting personal voices: Clarkson aggressively masculine and uses lots of exaggerated humour. Lacey conversational, like two mums talking (alludes to *American Idol*) with occasional humour.
 - Both use first ('I') and second person ('you' and 'your') voice effectively to establish a personal relationship with the reader.
 - Clarkson balances his approach by using reason to appeal to reader: evidence, questions, contrast and rhetorical words and phrases ('Not unreasonably' and 'However').
 - Lacey also uses reason (evidence and questions) but comes across as more balanced, adopting a more reasonable tone. Her criticisms are less strident ('you may want to watch your head').
 - Lacey's review is formatted for quick and easy access of information (subheadings and ratings) suiting the casual reader, while Clarkson relies on his personality to maintain reader interest.
 - Lacey's piece contains shorter sentences that highlight the information she is communicating. Clarkson's contains much longer sentences that indulge in elaborating on his ironic humour.
 - Lacey uses everyday popular cultural allusions to engage her reader while Clarkson relies heavily on his wit to get the reader to think above the everyday.

Three more texts: two prose and a poem

Read the following three texts carefully and answer all parts of the question, (a), (b), and (c).

Text 1

Voice

I was given a voice. That's what people said about me. I cultivated my voice, because it would be a shame to waste such a gift. I pictured this voice as a hothouse plant, something luxuriant, with glossy foliage and the word *tuberous* in the name, and a musky scent at night. I made sure the voice was provided with the right temperature, the right degree of humidity, the right ambience. I soothed its fears; I told it not to tremble. I nurtured it, I trained it, I watched it climb up inside my neck like a vine.

The voice bloomed. People said I had grown into my voice. Soon I was sought after, or rather my voice was. We went everywhere together. What people saw was me, what I saw was my voice, ballooning out in front of me like the translucent greenish membrane of a frog in full trill.

My voice was courted. Bouquets were thrown to it. Money was bestowed on it. Men fell on their knees before it. Applause flew around it like flocks of red birds.

Invitations to perform cascaded over us. All the best places wanted us, and all at once, for, as people said – though not to me – my voice would thrive only for a certain term. Then, as voices do, it would begin to shrivel. Finally it would drop

off, and I would be left alone, denuded – a dead shrub, a footnote.

It's begun to happen, the shrivelling. Only I have noticed it so far. There's the barest pucker in my voice, the barest wrinkle. Fear has entered me, a needful of ether, constricting what in someone else would be my heart.

Now it's evening; the neon lights come on, excitement quickens in the streets. We sit in this hotel room, my voice and I; or rather in this hotel suite, because it's still nothing but the best for us. We're gathering our strength together. How much of my life do I have left? Left over, that is: my voice has used up most of it. I've given it all my love, but it's only a voice, it can never love me in return.

Although it's begun to decay, my voice is still as greedy as ever. Greedier: it wants more, more and more, more of everything it's had so far. It won't let go of me easily.

Soon it will be time for us to go out. We'll attend a luminous occasion, the two of us, chained together as always. I'll put on its favourite dress, its favourite necklace. I'll wind a fur around it, to protect it from the drafts. Then we'll descend to the foyer, glittering like ice, my voice attached like an invisible vampire to my throat.

Source: Margaret Atwood, 2006. *The Tent*, Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, New York, pp. 21–3.

Text 2

Look at Me: Living in a society of attention-seekers

by Susan L. Smalley, Ph.D.*

I met a woman the other day who radiates contentment. She lives on a houseboat in London on the Thames and has a day job helping people give speeches. With a son and a long-time partner, she spends her time outside of work making things — like doors (for cupboards, entryways, etc.), or gardening her boat-top garden, or remodeling a boat for future travels.

She has a glow about her that reflects contentment and her open-hearted nature. Preparing for a short ride on the river, she offered me her warm cashmere ‘dress-up’ coat, in lieu of the fisherman sort of gear normally worn. Although I begged not to borrow such nice clothing for the boat ride, she insisted with such passion, I knew I had to say yes. She exudes kindness — to a friend or stranger.

On our ride, we were talking about some celebrity scandal in the news and she remarked ‘who would want to be famous!’, a sentiment many say but few I know really believe.

When I look around at the number of bloggers, tweets, wikipages, Facebook friends, and outlets for expression, it seems we’ve hit a crescendo of ‘look at me’ activity, a striving for attention enveloping the globe. I often find myself caught in that web of self-promotion — particularly as part of marketing a book. I find reflecting on the ‘content of writing’ vs. ‘me as the writer’ is a means around it yet the distinction challenges me everyday. The woman I met living life on a boat was as far from desiring such recognition as anyone I’ve ever known. And her ease and happiness were palpable.

Why is seeking recognition so prominent in the West today? A Pew poll cites ‘getting famous’ as one of the top 2 goals of graduating high school students (the other being ‘getting rich’). Historically, that same Pew poll reveals a steady

increase in these goals over the last several decades. But what becomes less desirable as fame and fortune move more to the top? Things like civic involvement and spiritual engagement have lost ground. So it seems our society is shifting, with ‘attention-getting’ moving way to the top — at whatever the cost. Celebrities are front-page news regardless of what they do to get there; some are famous merely by their ability to become famous.

Perhaps this striving has escalated because our numbers have grown so large. Being unique among 6 billion people requires a lot of work. Perhaps it is due to our praise of children for their uniqueness that may back-fire in adulthood when we notice how very much alike we all are. Perhaps it is merely our media access and newfound means of sharing ‘who we are’ to everyone who will listen.

I once read a quote by a South American shaman who said he was ‘practicing the art of invisibility’. When queried by the writer as to why, he said that he could accomplish so much more from an invisible position than one of fame. I’ve wondered about that quote for a long time but think that part of the reason is that there is greater freedom to act when action is not tinged with attention-seeking. There is likely more energy available to affect change if one is not expending it on promoting oneself.

Turning a lens on our inward experiences with an eye toward detection of such striving may help shift it into our own lives and possibly our collective consciousness.

I think we all need to value anonymity a bit more. Perhaps if we do, we may find ourselves a little bit more content, happy and kind.

Source: Susan L. Smalley, 2010. ‘Look at Me: Living in a society of attention-seekers’, *Psychology Today*, 2 November. Accessed 28 March 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/look-around-and-look-within/201011/look-me-living-in-society-attention-seekers>

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Text 3

Beautiful

The camera loved her, close-up, back-lit, adored the waxy pouting of her mouth, her sleepy, startled gaze. She breathed the script out in her little voice. They filmed her famous, filmed her beautiful. Guys fell in love, dames copied her. An athlete licked the raindrops from her fingertips to quench his thirst. She married him. The US whooped.

They filmed her harder, harder, till her hair was platinum, her teeth gems, her eyes sapphires pressed by a banker's thumb. She sang to camera one, gushed at the greased-up lens, her skin investors' gold, her fingernails mother-of-pearl, her voice champagne to sip from her lips. A poet came, found her wondrous to behold. She married him. The whole world swooned.

Dumb beauty. She slept in an eye-mask, naked, drugged, till the maid came, sponged at her puffy face, painted the beauty on in beige, pinks, blues. Then it was coffee, pills, booze, Frank on the record-player, it was put on the mink, get in the studio car. Somebody big was watching her – white fur, mouth at the mike, under the lights. *Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday, Mr President.* The audience drooled.

They filmed on, deep, dumped what they couldn't use on the cutting-room floor, filmed more, quiet please, action, cut, quiet please, action, cut, quiet please, action, cut, till she couldn't die when she died, couldn't get older, ill, couldn't stop saying the lines or singing the tunes...

Source: Extract from Carol Ann Duffy, 2003. 'Beautiful' in *Feminine Gospels*, Picador, London, pp. 12–13.

Questions

You must answer **all** parts of this question.

- What does each of the three authors suggest is the appeal of 'getting famous'? (*one or two paragraphs*)
- Compare the consequences of fame presented by each of the three authors. (*one or two paragraphs*)
- Compare the ways in which the three authors use stylistic features to explore the effects of fame. (*three or more paragraphs*)

A snapshot

When reading the texts it is important to quickly decide the point of view of each text. Each text deals with the allure and destructive nature of striving for fame but each varies in its exploration of the consequences and solutions, implied or stated. Language techniques and stylistic features are used to highlight and amplify their points of view and persuade you to accept or consider them.

- (a) What does each of the three authors suggest is the appeal of ‘getting famous’? (*one or two paragraphs*)

Tip: Acknowledge the type of texts you are dealing with early so that you can frame your overall discussion, particularly when you come to techniques later.

Text	Type	Appeal of ‘getting famous’	Effective quotations
Text 1	Interior monologue	The subject of the piece is attached to fame even though she fears being ‘used up’ by her voice. She is attracted to ‘bouquets’, ‘men’, ‘applause’, and being ‘sought after’ and ‘courted’.	‘Applause flew around it like flocks of red birds’
Text 2	Opinion	After establishing that fame is simply a desire to seek attention, Smalley suggests some reasons why: the emphasis on individuality in a world of 6 billion people, too much focus by parents on the ‘uniqueness’ of their children, and the burgeoning social networks that provide the opportunities for a chance at fame.	‘we’ve hit a crescendo of “look at me” activity’
Text 3	Poem	In a similar manner to Text 1, Duffy’s text focuses on attention (camera), flattery (famous people) and the desire for love (‘the camera loved her’) as the main appeal of ‘getting famous’. Other benefits include maids and access to drugs.	‘An athlete licked the raindrops from her fingertips to quench his thirst’

- (b) Compare the consequences of fame presented by each of the three authors. (*one or two paragraphs*)

Tip: Remember to integrate your discussion of the consequences of fame and to discuss both the similarities and differences.

Text	Consequences	Effective quotations	Similarities/differences
‘Voice’	Loss of identity Subject becomes a commodity Subject is largely aware of this	‘How much of my life do I have left? Left over, that is: my voice has used up most of it’	All texts agree that while fame is alluring it is mostly destructive. Texts 1 and 3 are somewhat negative about the consequences of fame (the subject is turned into an object), whereas Text 2 invites us to view the consequences of attention-seeking in the hope of effecting a change for the benefit of society (‘detection of such striving ... may help’). Text 2 contrasts with the other texts in its solution of anonymity. All texts agree that public attention, magnified by various media, fosters a basic human weakness: the desire to be special.
‘Look at Me’	Destructive to the social fabric of society	‘civic involvement and spiritual engagement have lost ground’	
‘Beautiful’	Physically and emotionally destructive Subject becomes a commodity Subject is unaware	‘She slept in an eye-mask, naked, drugged ... puffy face’	

- (c) Compare the ways in which the three authors use stylistic features to explore the effects of fame. (three or more paragraphs)

Tip: Once again, be aware that ‘compare’ means to discuss the similarities and differences. Note also that ‘stylistic features’ refers to both the author’s personal style and that of the text type they are using.

Text	Stylistic features	Function	Similarities/differences
‘Voice’	<p>First person voice, ‘I’ (interior monologue)</p> <p>Simile (voice as ‘hothouse plant’)</p> <p>Personification of voice (‘my voice is still as greedy as ever’)</p> <p>Structured around extended metaphor of voice as a plant</p>	<p>The personal voice draws us in to the interior world of the speaker.</p> <p>The simile and personification enlist sympathy for her, as she seems to be a victim of circumstances beyond her control (‘an invisible vampire attached to my throat’).</p>	<p>All three texts are structured to lead the reader to a conclusion.</p> <p>All use a particular structuring device: plant metaphor, anecdote and camera.</p> <p>Text 1 provides the reader with a personal insight into the striving for fame that Text 2 encourages us to resist, while Text 3 positions us a detached observers.</p>
‘Look at Me’	<p>First person voice, typical of opinion column (‘I often find myself caught in a web of self-promotion’)</p> <p>Inclusive pronouns (‘I think we all need to value anonymity a bit more’)</p> <p>Personal anecdote of the woman who ‘radiates contentment’ upon which the piece is constructed</p> <p>Evidence: quote by South American shaman</p>	<p>First person voice and inclusive pronouns seek to establish a personal relationship with readers and encourage them to see the problem as their own.</p> <p>The anecdote and the quote represent an alternative perspective to striving for fame: the perspective the author wants us to adopt.</p>	<p>Imagery in Texts 1 and 3 (‘shrivelling’ [1] and ‘puffy face, [2]) encourages the reader to view fame as an inevitable path to decline. Text 2 is less reliant on imagery, though one notable example is, ‘a web of self-promotion’).</p>
‘Beautiful’	<p>Objective voice (‘her’, ‘she’)</p> <p>Imagery (‘teeth gems’, ‘eyes sapphires’)</p> <p>Stanza structure (poem) charts subject’s decline (what the camera sees changes with every stanza)</p>	<p>Readers are positioned as observers and can think more critically about what they see. They are compelled through the imagery to see the subject as a commodity. Further imagery charts her degeneration.</p>	

SECTION

11

Past Examinations

Four more texts: two prose and two poems.

Text 1

Return of the Prince

by Alice Gordon

It was envy that blinded me,
green-skinned, green-gilled,
green-filtered vision.
Blinded by the beauty
of that cold gold ball.
Deafened by the siren call
of everything I was not,
of everything beyond
the small world of pond.

I should have known
as her dry lips scraped
my moist amphibious cheek,
— skin shrivelling, dehydrating,
fading to pale and milky
limbs thickening,
hirsute, heavy
as the regal kiss cursed,
cursed me into this princely form.

Now I long for oozing mud and muck,
for the smell of something true —
pungent stew of silt, lichen, moss and algae,
the syrupy funk of pond scum,
not this artificial perfumed palace.
Royal air is dry, unmoving,
not the living damp gusts that cloy
with sticky vitality through trembling reeds.

I long for dragonflies,
not dragon tapestries,
for the warm midsummer moon,
not armored knights.
I long for swarming fogs of flies,
not orderly golden plates.
How I long for a brackish pond,
round slimy pebbles slipping
beneath soft clammy webbing,
not cobblestones hard under parched flesh.
I feel the pull of a watery abyss
far from fixed towering turrets.

Unprincely, shedding my velvets,
silks and satins, clothed in mud,
I lie at the water's edge,
prone beneath the stars —
those true jewelled balls.
Back in her royal bedchamber
she sleeps anchored
in untruthful happy ever afters.

To the melodic swell of croaking
I drop her purloined ball,
golden orb, disappearing
into the depths of the well,
anything to sink and swim,
anything to break my curse
anything to return.

Text 2

The Frog Prince

Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess who went out into the forest and sat down at the edge of a cool well. She had a golden ball that was her favourite plaything. She threw it up high and caught it in the air and was delighted by all this. One time the ball flew up very high, hit the ground out of her reach and rolled and rolled until it fell right into the water.

The princess was horrified, and when she went to look for the ball, she found the well was so deep that she couldn't see the bottom. So she began to weep miserably and to lament: "Oh, if only I had my ball again! I'd give anything — my clothes, my jewels, my pearls and anything else in the world — to get my ball back!"

As she sat there grieving, a frog stuck its head out of the water and said: "Why are you weeping so miserably?"

"Oh," she said, "you nasty frog, you can't help me! My golden ball has fallen into the water."

"Well, I don't want your pearls, your jewels, and your clothes," the frog responded. "But if you will accept me as your companion and let me sit next to you and let me eat from your little golden plate and sleep in your little bed and promise to love and cherish me, I'll fetch your ball for you."

The princess thought, "What nonsense the simple-minded frog is blabbering! He's got to remain in his water. But perhaps he can get me my ball. So I'll say yes to him." And she said, "Yes, fair enough, but first fetch me the golden ball. I promise you everything."

The frog dipped his head beneath the water and dived down. It didn't take long before he came back to the surface with the ball in his mouth. He threw it onto the ground, and when the princess caught sight of the ball, she quickly ran over to it, picked it up, and was so delighted to have the ball in her hands again that she thought of nothing else but to rush back home with it. The frog called after her: "Wait, princess, take me with you the way you promised!"

But she didn't pay any attention to him.

That evening the princess sat at the table and heard something coming up the marble steps, *splish, splash! splish, splash!* Soon thereafter there was a knock at the door and a cry: "Princess, youngest daughter, open up!"

She ran to the door and opened it, and there was the frog whom she had forgotten. Horrified, she quickly slammed the door shut and sat down back at the

table. But the king saw that her heart was thumping and said, "Why are you afraid?"

"There's a nasty frog outside," she replied. "He retrieved my golden ball from the water, and I promised him that he could be my companion. But I never believed at all he could get out of the water. Now he's standing outside in front of the door and wants to come inside."

As she said this, there was a knock at the door, and the frog cried out: "Princess, youngest daughter, Open up!"

Don't you remember, what you said down by the well's cool water?

Princess, youngest daughter, Open up!"

The king said: "You must keep your promise no matter what you said. Go and open the door for the frog."

She obeyed, and the frog hopped inside and followed her at her heels until they came to her chair, and when she sat down again, he cried out: "Lift me up to the chair beside you."

The princess didn't want to do this, but the king ordered her to do it. When the frog was up at the table, he said: "Now push your little golden plate nearer to me so we can eat together."

The princess had to do this as well, and after he had eaten until he was full, he said: "Now I'm tired and want to sleep. Bring me upstairs to your little room. Get your little bed ready so that we can lie down in it."

The princess became terrified when she heard this, for she was afraid of the cold frog. She didn't dare to touch him, and now he was to lie in her bed next to her. She began to weep and didn't want to comply with his wishes at all. But the king became angry and ordered her to do what she had promised, or she'd be held in disgrace. Nothing helped. She had to do what her father wanted, but she was bitterly angry in her heart. So she picked up the frog with two fingers, carried him upstairs into her room, lay down in her bed, and instead of setting him down next to her, she flung him away. "Now you'll leave me in peace, you nasty frog!"

But the frog didn't fall down dead. Instead, when he fell, he became a handsome young prince. Well, now indeed he did become her dear companion, and she cherished him as she had promised, and in their delight they fell asleep together, and from that moment lived together, happily ever after.

Source: Adapted from Jacob & Wilhelm Grimm, translated by Jack Zipes, 2014. 'The Frog King, or Iron Henry' in *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp. 13–15.

Text 3

Desperate Times, Desperate Measures*by William J. Miller*

It's the boy
Small, overlooked, tripping over a stutter
Never selected
Who plies the captain with cash
And at least gets to sit on the bench

It's the refugee
Displaced, undereducated, heating scraps with dung
Continuously moving
Who signs away her culture
And at least gets to eat McDonald's

It's the mother
Abandoned, house-bound, spawned down with kids
Always on duty
Who uploads fake profiles
And at least bytes on some midnight love

It's the worker
Identity-less cog, machined to the bone
Completely ground down
Who slips into bed with the regime
And at least grabs a little promotion

It's the stockbroker
From a boondock family of wharfies
Tempted ever higher
Who trades his values on the Exchange
And at least plays briefly with the big boys

It's the frog
All leathery green, bug-eyed, unseen
Entirely amphibian
Who cops a load of abuse
And at last gets to kiss the princess

It's the desperate
Knocked down and out
Seemingly deprived
That sell out cheap
And win, only to lose

Text 4

The Wary Reader

#blog17: Heads you win; Tales you lose

Salutations my band of merry followers! This morning I send a particularly heartfelt welcome to the twenty-eight new members of this site on which we turn our searing gaze upon popular myths and stories: we applaud your wisdom in choosing to join us!

Gotta say, first up, that I was pleasantly surprised by the responses to my deconstruction of Shrek last week: I was literally swamped (yes, yes — I hear that collective *sigh*!) by your comments. That so many of you have a soft spot for that lumpy, smelly grump became obvious ogre and ogre again (hee hee!). And that got me thinking about another famous green character who is transformed by a kiss: that frog/prince. For those who have forgotten the details here's a quick refresher on the popularly accepted version:

An innocent, hapless prince is cursed by a vindictive old witch and transformed into a frog. The spell can only be broken by a lip-smacking impossibility: a kiss from a beautiful princess. By sheer coincidence such royal offspring wanders through the marshes playing with her favourite golden ball. She accidentally drops the plaything into the water and the frog sees his chance. A bit of clever negotiation and a deal is struck: he will fetch the ball if she promises to take him to the palace, let him eat from her dinner plate, sleep in her bed, and love him. She thoughtlessly agrees to his conditions, snatches the ball, and prances home to the palace. In the petulant naivety of youth she believes that she is done with her amphibious helper. When the frog knocks on the palace doors at dinnertime that evening, she initially reacts by snubbing both him and her own promises. But her authoritarian father — the King — demands that she keep her word and avoid moral disgrace. With no real choice, she eats with the frog, lies alongside him and finally — in many versions of the story — kisses him. And voila: slimy frog becomes handsome prince! Of course the two then marry and live happily ever after.

Heart-warming, isn't it? Love triumphs over the curse. Ugliness is transformed to beauty. And the perfect union of prince and princess is the happy outcome. This is the wonderful stuff of bedtime stories.

Ah yes, bedtime stories and fairytales. How we love 'em!

But have you ever considered that those tales we tell before bed subtly influence our children's thinking? Like all stories they contain ideologies and values and social assumptions. They reinforce cultural stereotypes.

Take, for example, this story of the princess and her frog.

Firstly. Notice something about the social position of the characters? They are royalty. Implication: the lives of ordinary people are not worthy of folklore. To be of significance — of value — people need status. These sorts of stories emphasise the importance of social hierarchies and attach prestige to rank. Is it possible, therefore, that fairytales are partly responsible for our fascination with, and envy of, the rich and famous? Maybe. Maybe not. But these stories certainly reinforce the romanticism of a power structure where kings are the ultimate figureheads. And what place does democracy — that should, by nature, value the ordinary citizen — have in such a tale?

Secondly. Think about what is really celebrated in this story: attractive appearance. The princess is beautiful. In his ugliness the frog is an object to be rejected; but being transformed to his naturally handsome form makes him instantly desirable. The foundation of the mandatory marriage between the two is not mutual understanding or time-honoured friendship but merely compatible looks. Only moments prior the princess had been repulsed by the frog. What changed? Presumably not his character, but most certainly his physical appeal! And from what the frog had seen of the childish princess, surely he didn't fall in love with her petulant personality!?

And what of this shotgun-all-about-your-stunning-looks wedding that ends the story? Well — as we know — it is the magical recipe for living happily ever after, of course. (*dramatic pause*) Really?! The prince and the princess never faced a difference of opinion? They never struggled with compromise or conflict or the necessity of sacrificing one for the other? They never encountered times of trial? They never dealt with sadness, or loss, or sickness, or ageing? Never ever? Do we really want to teach our children that when Handsome accompanies Beautiful to the altar all will be well? Go right ahead and I'll tell you how our enchanted grooms and brides will end up: disillusioned!

And finally, if all of that is not enough to wreck your love of fairytales, there is also that elephant in the room: the representation of males and females.

Consider the male characters. The frog prince, morally faultless, is undeservingly victimised by an enchantress. But, like most heroes, he overcomes impossible obstacles — employing that one unaffected asset: his shrewd mind — and so resumes his rightful form as an alluring lover. The other man in the story is the princess's father, a powerful patriarch who challenges his childish daughter's peevish sense of entitlement and reinforces fittingly regal behaviour. The magical outcome affirms that the discipline of his errant daughter was warranted. The male characters in this story are the protagonists: the ones for whom the reader feels sympathy and who do 'the right thing' by upholding the moral standard.

And the females? Relegated to the background, but nonetheless a destructive influence, the witch — stereotypically old (senior citizens take note!) — is meddling and malicious. And the princess — while no villain — is nonetheless naive, self-centred and dishonourable. Neither can outwit the men in the story, and while the princess is eventually rewarded with becoming a wife/queen, it is only because the steady hand of a wise male guided her to the rightful beau.

So, think about those who are marginalised in this apparently endearing story: the elderly (who are embittered); the young (who are foolish); women

(who are poor role models); ordinary folk (who are unworthy of note); and the unattractive (who are, well ... unattractive!). The message: get powerful, get beautiful, and get married ... and experience the magic!

I realise that many of you might be thinking that I am over-reacting. But before you 🗨 me let me remind you that all texts represent beliefs, concepts and people in particular ways. Those texts are produced from an ideological viewpoint and can either subvert or support cultural perspectives. As readers we can be influenced by the texts we experience, and sometimes in very covert ways. To be a good reader is to be critically aware of the ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives and values and therefore to be conscious of the ways in which we might be influenced by those texts. And who are the most vulnerable and impressionable readers? Our children! At the very least we should engage in dialogue about these stories that we so faithfully pass on to them and discuss the stereotypes that we might be surreptitiously presenting. Let's be careful not to get so enchanted by fairytales that we lose our mindful wariness and leave the influence of these stories on our children to luck alone.

Sobering, I know. But ponder these things my friends and until next week remember: Happily Ever After? No: Happier When We're Smarter!

Kind benedictions to all, The Wary Reader

Questions

You must answer **all** parts of the question.

- Choose *one* of the four texts and explain how the title establishes its central ideas. (*two or three sentences*)
- How does the author of 'The Frog Prince' (Text 1) show that the frog is not 'simple-minded' as the princess assumes? (*one paragraph*)
- In what ways do the authors of the poems (Text 2 and Text 3) challenge the concept of 'happily ever after'? (*one or two paragraphs*)
- Based on what the author of the blog (Text 4) has written, how would The Wary Reader be likely to respond to the characterisation of the princess in 'The Frog Prince' (Text 1)? (*one or two paragraphs*)
- Choose *one* prose text (Text 1 or Text 4), and *one* poem (Text 2 or Text 3). Explore the ways in which the authors use the features of each text type to present ideas. (*two or more paragraphs*)

Notes on the 2017 English Literary Studies examination

The following commentaries is based on the Subject Assessment Advice available on the SACE website. It is always a good idea to read the full document as it contains relevant information for the entire course.

For the first critical reading of the new course there were four texts and five questions, some enabling students to make choices about which texts to respond to. The notes below contain suggestions for answers for those students who wish to practise the examination. While it is not expected that students include everything below, a significant portion would see students achieving at a high level.

- (a) Choose one of the four texts and explain how the title establishes its central ideas. (*two or three sentences*)

It is important to note that only two or three sentences are required here. To write more extensively than this is wasting valuable examination time.

The Frog Prince: Both the plot and the ideas of the story are embedded within the juxtaposition of the words 'frog' and 'prince'. A frog wants to be a prince but has to deal with the tension between his appearance (looks a frog) and the reality (he is actually a prince), given that he will only be accepted by the princess if he looks like a prince.

Desperate Times, Desperate Measures: In a similar manner to the story above, the title of the poem alerts the reader to the content: a range of characters facing hardship (shy boy, homeless refugee, desperate mother, and the like) and the 'desperate measures' they take to improve their lot in life. The title of the poem is also a well-known saying, which means that people make compromises when things get desperate. In other words, 'selling out', as indicated in the last verse.

Return of the Prince: The word 'return' here is quite suggestive, and brings to mind many other similar titles that begin with the same word. It suggests a restoration of order or balance. In this case the prince (ironically) wants to return to the 'ooze' and 'damp' of the well because he misses the life he felt more at home in.

The Wary Reader #blog17: Heads you win; tales you lose. The key phrases for consideration here are 'Wary Reader' and 'Heads you win: tales you lose'. The first indicates the motivation behind the blog, a writer who exercises caution when reading, and the second foreshadows the main point of the blog that we cannot 'leave the influence of these stories on our children to luck alone.'

- (b) How does the author of 'The Frog Prince' (Text 1) show that the frog is not 'simple-minded' as the princess assumes? (*one paragraph*)

The key technique that should be addressed here is characterisation: what the author gets a character to say and do. A third element of characterisation, physical description, is not relevant here as it is almost non-existent.

As with many fairy tales, this text is dialogue-orientated. It is important to pay attention to what the frog says to get an understanding of his character. The dialogue is quite sophisticated for a frog (remembering that he really is a prince). The frog is a skillful negotiator. He quickly realises the potential of the situation and firmly establishes his position at the start when he tells her he doesn't want her 'pearls', 'jewels' or 'clothes'. This is enough to convince her of the deal.

He is also very determined and persistent and, despite his diminutive size, acts authoritatively throughout. His use of imperatives is quite conspicuous: 'Open up', 'Lift me', 'Now push'. The frog is fully aware that he has her father on his side and takes advantage of it. In the end his cunning is 'rewarded' by being transformed back into a prince, proving that he is far from 'simple-minded'.

- (c) In what ways do the authors of the poems (Text 2 and Text 3) challenge the concept of 'happily ever after'? (*one or two paragraphs*)

Reading the question carefully is very important. Note that there is no instruction to compare the two poems.

Desperate Times, Desperate Measures

The characters in this poem are suffering hardship they wish to escape from (the worker is 'ground down', the mother is 'house-bound'). They achieve some form of escape (the worker 'grabs a little promotion', the mother 'bytes on some midnight love') but it comes at a cost (the worker must 'slip into bed with the regime', the mother creates a false identity). 'Happy ever after' for the characters in the poem is a pale imitation of real happiness. It is soured by the sacrifices the characters have to make. The frog might get to kiss his princess but he 'cops a load of abuse'. The reader is directed

to see that the gain is hardly worth the cost and that the concept of 'happy ever after' is highly questionable.

The Return of the Prince

In the first stanza the speaker establishes the motivation behind the frog's desire to be a prince. He was 'blinded' and 'deafened' by a vision of 'everything [he] was not'. On becoming a prince he soon realises his folly ('I should have known / as her dry lips scraped / my moist amphibious cheek') that he is out of his element. Through a series of contrasts, repeated by the pattern 'I long ... not' ('I long for swarming fogs of flies, / not orderly golden plates') the speaker establishes his longing to return to the well. 'Ever after', according to the speaker, will promise much but deliver nothing but unhappiness and is therefore a 'curse'. His dropping of the 'purloined ball' back 'into the depths of the well' is a symbolic act to warn of the reality of the 'siren call', which is in fact an 'untruthful happy ever after.' As such, the poem is very cynical about happy endings. The sentiments here are very similar to the expression 'be careful what you wish for'.

- (d) Based on what the author of the blog (Text 4) has written, how would The Wary Reader be likely to respond to the characterisation of the princess in 'The Frog Prince' (Text 1)? (*one or two paragraphs*)

The answer to this question requires a thorough understanding of the blogger's main concerns. These were clearly spelt out in the blog ('Firstly', 'Secondly') and can be grouped as follows: social status, ideas of beauty, the complexities of relationships and representations of gender. The points below would be of particular concern for the blogger.

There is an emphasis on characters of a high social standing. Apart from the king and the frog (who is a prince) the main character that the child is expected to identify with is a princess, a character of privilege, who is selfish (she only considers her needs and has no time for the frog) and a liar (she acquiesces to the frog's request, even though she knows she will not keep her side of the bargain). The fact that she has no name and is a princess lends authority to the young character's actions.

There is an emphasis on physical appearance. The princess is introduced as 'beautiful', the simple adjective pointing to a common assumption that beauty equals virtue. But the princess's behaviour is far from virtuous. She behaves like a spoiled brat, something which the child reader may be directed to overlook. Furthermore, after her final petulant act, she is rewarded with the appearance of a 'handsome' prince, which immediately dissolves all her animosity. Clearly the message of the tale is that physical attractiveness counts more than personal integrity.

The sudden resolution of the story follows on from the emphasis on beauty. The princess decides without any thought or question to marry the prince, which is clearly at odds with the reality of relationships, especially those consummated by marriage. Marriage is not an automatic 'happy ever after'. There is the '[struggle] with compromise or conflict [and] the necessity of sacrificing one for the other' as The Wary Reader observes. Clearly the princess is ill-suited, at this stage, for marriage. Such naivety is exactly what the blogger is trying to warn us about.

Power within the fairy tale is distributed very much according to gender. The king has ultimate authority and the princess must obey him, even if it means having dinner and sleeping with a frog! Next in the hierarchy of power is the frog (a prince) who is able to get the princess to do his bidding because the king directed her to do so. Here we see the representation of a rigid patriarchal structure that allows no room for questioning, a structure that to a child reader remains uncontested.

- (e) Choose one prose text (Text 1 or Text 4) and one poem (Text 2 or Text 3). Explore the ways in which the authors use the features of each text type to present ideas. (*two or more paragraphs*)

As in question (c), students are not directed to compare the two texts they choose to answer. The key features worthy of discussion are listed below.

The Frog Prince

The story follows a traditional fairy tale structure: orientation (the princess is playing with her 'golden ball'), problem (she loses her ball, activating the curse on the frog) and a magical, transformative resolution. The structure is typically linear and is driven by action described in simple active sentences (subject/verb).

Familiar phrases are used to support this narrative trajectory. It begins with 'Once upon a time' and ends with 'happily ever after'. The reader can expect from the opening line that the story will end happily, despite obstacles along the way.

The characters are given generic names (princess, frog, king) which define their role within the fairy tale more so than their character. This is a strategy (conscious or unconscious) to reinforce social norms and behaviour.

It is told, as is usual, in the third person, but focuses mainly on the emotions and thoughts of the main character, the princess. It is through the main character that the reinforcement of social norms is most strongly felt.

Desperate Times, Desperate Measures

Repetition is a key technique in this poem. Each verse begins with 'It's the ...' and provides an example of someone who, in adversity, is compelled to 'sell out cheap'. Not only the repetition of the phrase but the number of repetitions reinforces the extent of the problem. In the final verse the repetition leads to a summary and a statement that clinches the point of the poem.

Another phrase that is repeated throughout is 'at least'. This is strategically placed before each gain to highlight its hollow nature. Other qualifiers are also used to temper the gains ('some', 'little', 'briefly').

Carefully selected metaphors amplify the issue. The refugee 'signs away her culture'. The worker is 'machined to the bone' and 'slips into bed with the regime'.

There is also some conspicuous wordplay worth commenting on, particularly the irony embedded in the words 'byte' and 'trade', where the former suggests both nourishment and the sterile world of technology and the latter suggests both empowerment in the act of trading as well as the sense of being traded.

Return of the Prince

The structure of the poem is significant in presenting its ideas to the reader. The first two verses establish the problem that the prince was duped. Verses three and four detail his longing for the way things used to be (reinforced in the phrase 'I long ...'). The final two verses detail his defiant gesture against what he was fated to become and serve as a warning to those who may be seduced by the 'siren call'. Instead the reader is advised to be satisfied with what he or she has.

Unlike the above two texts, and like the last text, this text is written in the first person. This provides a more complex and nuanced understanding of character.

To reinforce the regret that the prince feels, imagery is used effectively throughout. He remembers with delight the 'pungent stew' and 'syrupy funk' of the pond.

This imagery is contrasted with the imagery of his current life. Instead of 'round slimy pebbles slipping / beneath soft clammy webbing' he now has 'cobblestones hard under parched flesh'.

Heads you win; tales you lose

Like the poem above, this piece uses the first person voice to provide a personal opinion, which is not surprising given that it is a blog. Blogs are generally more intimate in nature and the author uses a number of techniques to establish a personal relationship with the reader.

The writer uses direct address and begins by complimenting the reader. The casual nature of this address enlists the reader's trust. It is like having a conversation with a friend ('fairytales; how we love 'em!'). The blogger feigns familiarity with the reader ('many of you might be thinking that I am over-reacting') in a similar manner to a conversation between friends. This familiarity is further reinforced by inclusive pronouns which invite the reader into a community of shared beliefs.

Colloquial language is also used to cement the confidential nature of the relationship between author and reader. Everyday expressions, emoticons, abbreviations and clichés contribute to this.

Rhetorical questions are used to direct the reader's understanding and lead them to inevitable conclusions.

In contrast to the colloquial language employed throughout, the blogger also uses sophisticated, academic language. It is evident that the blogger has done some research on the topic.

The blog is also clearly structured, steering a coherent argument through all the banter. There is an introduction (a recap of the story of the frog prince), the articulation of the central concern, a logical analysis of the problems with the fairy tale, and a solution or suggestion for change.

Notes on the 2018 Critical Reading examination

The following commentaries based on the Subject Assessment Advice available on the SACE website. It is always a good idea to read the full document as it contains relevant information for the entire course.

- Each author of the three texts presents different aspects of the same event. In what ways does the content of the playscript (Text 2) and the prose text (Text 3) add to that provided by the poem (Text 1)? (one or two paragraphs)

To be successful with this answer you will need to summarise the content of the poem in a concise manner and point out where the content of the other texts adds to each of the points you have raised.

Below are some points you might raise:

- How the other texts, in providing differing points of view, add extra information about the characters and thereby enriching the reader's understanding of the characters.
- How the prose text gives the reader a backstory to some of the characters from the poem. This includes information beyond the competition, before and after.
- How the reader's distaste for Mrs Bishop, as opposed to the sympathy for the other characters, is augmented by the other texts, particularly in the playscript where the reader gets an insight into the motivation of Mrs Bishop. This goes hand-in-hand with the setting which reinforces her authority.
- The other texts also provide essential information that hints at more complex characterisation (e.g., Mrs Firth's drinking and Alistair Howard's 'immunity' from Mrs Bishop).

- Choose two of the texts. Compare the ways in which the authors have used the conventions of the text type to develop a character or characters. (three paragraphs)

The answer to this question should focus on the conventions of each text type. While other general techniques (symbolism, contrast and the like) will no doubt be touched upon, the conventions that mark each text type (lighting, stage directions [play], narrative perspective, internal monologue [prose] and figurative language, structure [poem]) should remain at the forefront.

Remember that this is a comparative question and that you must discuss similarities and differences.

Below are some points you might raise:

Poem:

The **structure** of the poem reinforces the character of Mrs Bishop. Each stanza is centred on one of the contestants but Mrs Bishop's dominance pervades throughout.

The **imagery** in the poem directs the reader to see Mrs Bishop as harsh and forbidding: adjectives ('merciless', 'ferocious'), similes ('her judgement sharp as a paring knife'), metaphors ('steely eyes') verbs ('raises an arched eyebrow', 'assured hands *question*').

Note also how the 'cakes and afternoon tea delicacies' mirror the characters (e.g., Mrs Frith's, 'lopsided ... tipsy' and 'slightly sunken').

Playscript:

The '*elevated podium-like centre*' (**staging**) on which Mrs Bishop stands and the seated contestants with their back to the audience (setting) reinforces her dominance.

Her **costume** (khaki-green 'uniform-like trousers') suggests military authority.

Mrs Bishop's **dialogue** is abrupt and aggressive. The others respond in a manner commensurate with their character (Lily's vocabulary is simple and her sentences short; Mrs Pikoulos responses are short or silent).

The carousel **music**, suggesting innocence and leisure, begins '*pretty*' but slowly becomes '*distorted ... more discordant*' and '*uncomfortable*' as the play progresses until it is '*just a moody cacophony*' reinforcing the increasing and unpleasant effect Mrs Bishop is having on the other characters.

The **lighting** (spotlight) on Mrs Bishop at the start and end reinforces her dominance as well as the '*searing, white light*' in between, underscoring how exposed the contestants feel.

Prose text:

Narrative perspective (first person for Alistair and Mrs Pikoulos and third person for Lily) gives the reader a view of the interior world of the characters.

Vocabulary and **sentence structure** reinforces characterisation: simple words and short sentences underlining Lily's innocent state; more complex sentences and sophisticated words reinforcing Alistair's more worldly and bookish life; the slightly awkward sentence structure in the last text reinforcing Mrs Pikoulos' struggle to understand her world through a second language.

Imagery immerses the reader in Lily's childlike world ('she hungrily licks the remaining jelly from her fingers'), Alistair's contrasting worlds ('Cloistered far from voices snarling orders and the staccato guillotining on stainless-steel benches') and Mrs Pikoulos' sorrowful existence ('Your anise and fennel patch is spindly and now mostly weeds').

3. Using the text you did not select for Question 2, explore the ways in which the author uses stylistic features to present ideas.

The first step in answering this question is identifying the ideas. These need to be articulated clearly to make discussion of stylistic features relevant. Ideas that may have been touched on in the above questions include, responses to difference, the pressure to conform, judgement, and bigger issues such as racism and gender.

While the stylistic features addressed in question two would serve in this question, better students would make a clear distinction between character development (question 2) and the ideas of each text (this question).

Below are some of the stylistic features for each text that may be considered in relation to the chosen ideas:

Poem:

- the contrast in imagery used to describe Mrs Bishop and the other characters reinforcing her power
- The way the structure of the poem underlines the divisiveness of the community (Mrs Bishop appears in each stanza policing this divisiveness)
- How individuality is reinforced through the association of each character with their product (imagery)
- **Playscript:**
- Mrs Bishop's judgmental attitude beyond the products placed before her is reinforced by the imperatives she uses ('Come into town more often' and 'to be one of us, you need to adapt')
- The pressure to conform, embodied in Mrs Bishop, is reinforced by the lighting, staging and costume
- The hierarchy of power underscored by the title and closing line, 'first place', and Mrs Bishop's dialogue which is akin to a domineering mother ('And what went into that syrup, Frith? In what special concoction have you indulged?')
- Difference and being judged highlighted by the stage directions ('with the hint of an accent' and 'finally drawn into it, defensive')

Prose text:

This text offers some alternative ideas to consider: growing up ('Lily Stephen's preparation'), change ('Alistair Howard's method') and isolation (Mrs Pikoulos' cure).

- For each one, the title prepares the reader for the main theme.
- The way the three texts are linked by the title prefaces ('Before', 'During' and 'After') connects the characters despite their differences.
- Narrative perspective also reinforces the ideas: Alistair and Mrs Pikoulos have grown up and speak for themselves but Lily has yet to find her own voice.
- The imagery highlights the ideas of each text: 'A baking debutante, coconut confetti lining the path, one foot in the door of adulthood' (Lily), 'Now I am a local librarian adrift in a monastery of hushed books' (Alistair) and 'I'm bitter and sour and full up with loneliness' (Mrs Pikoulos).

Sample paper

Questions

You must answer **all** three questions.

- Explain the significance of the bird (Text 1), the doll (Text 2) and the number nine (Text 3) in the passages below. (*one paragraph*)
- Choose *two* texts and explain the similarities and differences in the narrator's experience of grief. (*two paragraphs*)
- Compare the ways in which *two* of the authors attempt to engage their readers in the experience of grief. (*three or more paragraphs*)

Text 1

Dad

Four or five days after she died, I sat alone in the living room wondering what to do. Shuffling around, waiting for shock to give way, waiting for any kind of structured feeling to emerge from the organisational fakery of my days. I felt hung-empty. The children were asleep. I drank. I smoked roll-ups out of the window. I felt that perhaps the main result of her being gone would be that I would permanently become this organiser, this list-making trader in clichés of gratitude, machine-like architect of routines for small children with no Mum. Grief felt fourth-dimensional, abstract, faintly familiar. I was cold.

The friends and family who had been hanging around being kind had gone home to their own lives. When the children went to bed the flat had no meaning, nothing moved.

The doorbell rang and I braced myself for more kindness. Another lasagne, some books, a cuddle, some little potted ready-meals for the boys. Of course, I was becoming expert in the behaviour of orbiting griever. Being at the epicentre grants a curiously anthropological awareness of everybody else; the overwhelmeds, the affectedly lackadaisicals, the nothing so fars, the overstayers, the new best friends of hers, of mine, of the boys. The people I still have no fucking idea who they were. I felt like Earth in that extraordinary picture of the planet surrounded by a thick belt of space junk. I felt it would be years before the knotted-string dream of other people's performances of woe for my dead wife would thin enough for me to see any black space again, and of course — needless to say — thoughts of this kind made me feel guilty. But, I thought, in support of myself, everything has changed, and she is gone and I can think what I like. She would approve, because we were always over-analytical, cynical, probably disloyal, puzzled. Dinner party post-mortem bitches with kind intentions. Hypocrites. Friends.

The bell rang again.

I climbed down the carpeted stairs into the chilly hallway and opened the front door.

There were no streetlights, bins or paving stones. No shape or light, no form at all, just a stench.

There was a crack and a whoosh and I was smacked back, winded, onto the doorstep. The hallway was pitch black and freezing cold and I thought, 'What kind of world is it that I would be robbed in my home tonight?' And then I thought, 'Frankly, what does it matter?' I thought, 'Please don't wake the boys, they need their sleep. I will give you every penny I own just as long as you don't wake the boys.'

I opened my eyes and it was still dark and everything was crackling, rustling.

Feathers.

There was a rich smell of decay, a sweet furry stink of just-beyond-edible food, and moss, and leather, and yeast.

Feathers between my fingers, in my eyes, in my mouth, beneath me a feathery hammock lifting me up a foot above the tiled floor.

One shiny jet-black eye as big as my face, blinking slowly, in a leathery wrinkled socket, bulging out from a football-sized testicle.

SHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.

shhhhhhhh.

And this is what he said:

I won't leave until you don't need me any more.

Put me down, I said.

Not until you say hello.

Put. Me. Down, I croaked, and my piss warmed the cradle of his wing

You're frightened. Just say hello.

Hello.

Say it properly.

I lay back, resigned, and wished my wife wasn't dead. I wished I wasn't lying terrified in a giant bird embrace in my hallway. I wished I hadn't been obsessing about this thing just when the greatest tragedy of my life occurred. These were factual yearnings. It was bitterly wonderful. I had some clarity.

Hello Crow, I said. Good to finally meet you.

And he was gone.

For the first time in days I slept. I dreamt of afternoons in the forest.

Source: Max Porter, 2015. *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*, Faber and Faber, London.

Text 2

My First Baby

This isn't really a story. I'm just telling you what happened one summer when I was young. It was 1961, my first year away from home. I lived at Melbourne University, in a women's college on a beautiful elm-lined boulevard. I was free and happy. Everyone was clever and so was I.

When summer came and exams were over, I went home to Geelong. I could have hung around the house all day with my sisters and my brother. I could have gone swimming or read books. But I was a student now, and students had jobs. I typed on my little Hermes portable a neat letter of application to Bright and Hitchcocks, Geelong's biggest department store. They hired me for the Christmas rush. I could hardly wait to start.

They sent me to the basement. I went down a staircase with brass banisters, through the gardening and camping section, and into a stuffy dead-end corner. I had imagined books or cosmetics or nice cotton underwear, but I was to sell toys.

I liked it down there. The toys in those days were made of wood and paper and metal and cloth. We wrapped each purchase in a sheet of thick brown paper, and tied the parcel with string from a heavy ball that hung above the register. There wasn't time for scissors: you ran the string around your forefinger in a special loop and snapped it back against itself. I wore a white blouse and a big gathered cotton skirt with stiff petticoats, pulled in at the waist by a brown dog-collar belt. And stockings attached to a suspender belt, and shoes called 'flatties' which gave no support. My feet ached that summer. They ached rhythmically, like string quartets of pain, and, by the end of each day, like a great screaming Wagnerian orchestra.

But this is about another kind of pain.

On a certain shelf in our department stood the dolls. The goggle-eyed, sissy ones bored me. I despised their stiff hair and aprons, their tiny white shoes, their pink and useless feet. I sold a lot of them. I worked scornfully, packing and wrapping the ridiculous things in their cellophane-fronted boxes. I fancied myself an intellectual when aunts and mothers tilted their permed heads this way and that and smiled and went, 'Aaaaaah!'

But there was one doll that I did like. It lay flat on its back in a cardboard box. It was naked but for a nappy. Its torso was soft, its head was heavy. When you picked it up, its eyelids slid shut, its limbs flopped loosely and its head dropped back, exactly like a real baby. You had to hold it properly.

I came to feel that the doll was private and personal to me. I thought of buying it, but it was very

expensive—and imagine an intellectual turning up at home with a doll. I didn't want anyone else to buy it. Nobody showed any lasting interest in it, but I kept stowing it behind other items, just in case. Every afternoon at 5.30, before I went home, I made sure the doll was still safe, at the back of the shelf.

The Christmas rush became intense. We sweated down there in our stuffy department. I had less and less time for the doll. Entire days would pass when I didn't go looking for it. Then one afternoon I saw a middle-aged woman lurking behind the shelf where it was kept. She stayed there for a suspiciously long time. In a lull, I slid over to see what she was up to.

She had dug the doll out of its box, and she was holding it in her arms. Her head was bent over it. She didn't even notice I was there. I couldn't see her face but there was something about her posture that made me pause. Even with her back to me, she was radiating 'keep off'.

I returned to the cash register. She stayed behind the shelf for ten minutes, fifteen minutes. I was seething with jealousy. She didn't bring anything to the counter. After a while, she emerged from behind the shelf and disappeared up the stairs. Every day at the same time, she came back. She never looked at us or spoke to us. She made a beeline through the crowd of Christmas shoppers to the shelf where the doll was kept, took it out of the box, and held it in her arms. If any of us had to pass her, she turned her face away. She had a limp perm and her clothes were drab. I looked at her hand, but I can't remember now whether she was wearing a ring.

I was nineteen and I thought of her as old. She had no right to be cuddling a doll. It was indecent. It mortified and enraged me. But once as I passed, in my jealousy, she glanced up and our eyes met. She held my gaze for a moment, with my doll in her arms, and flashed me a tiny, embarrassed smile. Her face was tired. It was absolutely ordinary. And into my head shot the thought: her real baby died, years ago, and she will never get over it.

I walked quickly past. Soon she put the doll down and drifted away up the stairs.

I don't remember what happened to the doll. Within three years I'd had two abortions, and within eight years, a child. The abortions I went into briskly, without conscious regret. But now I'm in my fifties, they've come back to haunt me. I've had to grieve for them, and mourn them. I never expected this to happen. It was awful, and it took a long time. When it first surged up in me, I remembered the woman in the toy department, and the look she gave me. For the first time I understood it, and I grieved for her as well.

Source: Helen Garner, 2016. Everywhere I Look, Text Publishing, Melbourne.

Text 3

Nine

Nine years ago today, I was struggling to birth a nine pound eleven ounce baby boy with a knot in his umbilical cord, a baby boy who would turn me into a mom. What I didn't know is this same baby boy would also turn me into a cancer mom, and exactly forty-one months later, this baby boy's death would turn me into a bereaved mother at 9:00 in the morning.

Nines. They followed Caemon his whole life. He liked eight, but nine was the number of his birth month, his birth year, his birth weight, his death time. He beamed with pride each time he shared his birthdate: 9/5/09.

But with all this familiarity of nine, I don't know my son at nine. My boy should be nine years old today, but to imagine a nine-year-old Caemon is like trying to picture San Francisco in ninety years. Some of the structures are certainly familiar, but most of it is hard to fathom. I don't know what he would have enjoyed doing today, what sort of fabulous birthday food he would have wanted, what kinds of gifts I might have gotten him. I cannot picture him beyond his blonde hair and blue eyes—but would he still be blonde? I don't have any idea how tall he would have been or what his nine-year-old hugs might have felt like. Nine-year-old Caemon feels impossible.

But that's because nine-year-old Caemon is impossible.

I am five and a half years beyond my son's death, and I hardly know how to celebrate his birthday. His favorite foods of his three-year-old days are obvious. Those red Lindor Truffles will always make their way into my home on his day, and the toasting of his favorite cinnamon bread will fill the house with its warm aroma. Beyond this, beyond talking about him and wearing crocodiles and telling his stories, it becomes harder to know how to set aside the time for my son when there

is another life to be lived. And there is grief in that too.

Caemon's little sister, his *three-year-old* sister, started preschool today of all the emotionally charged days. The time leading up to this has been so filled with emotion. She turned three at the end of July, and every day since, I have watched her, studied her, because this is my first experience parenting a healthy three-year-old. Two weeks before Caemon's third birthday was his diagnosis date—just after his own first two days of preschool. He spent all but sixteen of his remaining days in the hospital.

The weaving of these milestones—my daughter starting school, Caemon's ninth birthday—feels like a handful of tangled necklaces. I can't figure out which bits belong to my grief and which strands belong to the normal pangs of a mother of a child growing up. To try and disentangle them feels an insurmountable task today, so I feel it all together, this big, shiny, messy muddle of love and anguish and fear and pride. It all belongs to me. It all belongs to my kids. My *kids*.

I rejoice in watching my three-year-old daughter conquer new fears and learn new words. I delight in her growth. It all reminds me of him though. She is just his size—his height his weight. She, like him, is not fond of babies. She, like him, has an insatiable appetite for muffin batter. And like him, she leads with her beautiful, gentle heart. But this year is where their paths diverge: Caemon will always be the memory of everything before three years and five months. But his sister will be continuing on. She will grow up. She will have friends and multiple first days of school. She will have hair, bruises that heal, and cuts that scar. She will have birthdays, lots of them. And she will have her own favorites.

Right now, her favorite number just happens to be nine.

Source: Timaree Marston-Simmons, 2018. 'Nine' in C is for Crocodile, 5 September. Accessed 15 September 2018: <https://cisforcrocodile.wordpress.com/2018/09/05/nine/>

Text 4

I'd come up here in order to write about my host's near-silent, anonymous life on the mountain, but for the moment I lost all sense of where I was. I could hardly believe that this rabbinical-seeming gentleman in wire-rimmed glasses and wool cap was in truth the singer and poet who'd been renowned for thirty years as an international heartthrob, a constant traveler, and an Armani-clad man of the world.

Leonard Cohen had come to this Old World redoubt to make a life—an art—out of stillness. And he was working on simplifying himself as fiercely as he might on the verses of one of his songs, which he spends more than ten years polishing to perfection. The week I was visiting, he was essentially spending seven days and nights in a bare meditation hall, sitting stock-still. His name in the monastery, Jikan, referred to the silence between two thoughts.

The rest of the time he largely spent doing odd jobs around the property, cleaning dishes in the kitchen and, most of all, tending to the Japanese abbot of the Mt. Baldy Zen Center, Joshu Sasaki, then eighty-eight years old. Cohen ended up sitting still with his elderly friend for more than forty years. One evening—four in the morning, the end of December—Cohen took time out from his meditations to walk down to my cabin and try to explain what he was doing here.

Sitting still, he said with unexpected passion, was “the real deep entertainment” he had found in his sixty-one years on the planet. “Real profound and voluptuous and delicious entertainment. The real feast that is available within this activity.”

Was he kidding? Cohen is famous for his mischief and ironies.

He wasn't, I realized as he went on. “What else would I be doing?” he asked. “Would I be starting a new marriage with a young woman and raising another family? Finding new drugs, buying more expensive wine? I don't know. This seems to me the most luxurious and sumptuous response to the emptiness of my own existence.”

Typically lofty and pitiless words; living on such close terms with silence clearly hadn't diminished his gift for golden sentences. But the words carried weight when coming from one who seemed to have tasted all the pleasures that the world has to offer.

Being in this remote place of stillness had nothing to do with piety or purity, he assured me; it was simply the most practical way he'd found of working through the confusion and terror that had long been his bedfellows. Sitting still with his aged Japanese friend, sipping Cour-voisier, and listening to the crickets deep into the night, was the closest he'd come to finding lasting happiness, the kind that doesn't change even when life throws up one of its regular challenges and disruptions.

“Nothing touches it,” Cohen said, as the light came into the cabin, of sitting still. Then he remembered himself, perhaps, and gave me a crinkly, crooked smile. “Except if you're courtin',” he added. “If you're young, the hormonal thrust has its own excitement.”

Going nowhere, as Cohen described it, was the grand adventure that makes sense of everywhere else.

Source: Extract, Pico Iyer, *The Art of Stillness: Adventures in Going Nowhere*

Text 5

Silence

There is the sudden silence of the crowd
above a player not moving on the field,
and the silence of the orchid.
The silence of the falling vase
before it strikes the floor,
the silence of the belt when it is not striking the child.
The stillness of the cup and the water in it,
the silence of the moon
and the quiet of the day far from the roar of the sun.
The silence when I hold you to my chest,
the silence of the window above us,
and the silence when you rise and turn away.
And there is the silence of this morning
which I have broken with my pen,
a silence that had piled up all night
like snow falling in the darkness of the house—
the silence before I wrote a word
and the poorer silence now.

Billy Collins

Text 6

I searched in my rucksack for the spare torch battery I knew was there. When I had fitted it, I switched on the beam and looked into the black space by my side. The bright new beam cut down through the blackness and lit ice walls that danced away down into depths my torch couldn't reach. The ice caught the light, so that it gleamed in blue, silver and green reflections, and I could see small rocks frozen into the surface dotted the walls at regular intervals. They glistened wetly as I swept the beam down the smooth scalloped dimples. I swallowed nervously. By the light I could see down into too feet of space. The walls, twenty feet apart, showed no sign of narrowing. I could only guess at how many hundreds of feet the blackness beyond my torch was hiding. In front of me the opposite wall of the crevasse reared up in a tangle of broken ice blocks and fifty feet above me they arched over to form a roof. The slope to my right fell away steeply for about thirty feet, after which it disappeared. Beyond it lay a drop into darkness.

The darkness beyond the light gripped my attention. I could guess what it hid, and I was filled with dread. I felt trapped, and looked quickly around me for some break in the walls. There was none. Ice flashed light back from hard blank walls, or else the beam was swallowed by the impenetrable blackness of the holes on either side. The roof covered the crevasse to my right and fell down in frozen chaos to my left, blocking the open end of the crevasse from my view. I was

in a huge cavern of snow and ice. Only the small black hole above, winking starlights at me, gave any view of another world, and unless I climbed the blocks it was as unreachable as the stars.

I turned the torch off to save the batteries. The darkness seemed more oppressive than ever. Discovering what I had fallen into hadn't cleared my mind. I was alone. The silent emptiness, and the dark, and the star-filled hole above, mocked my thoughts of escape ...

I swore bitterly, and the echoes from the darkness made it a futile gesture. I swore again, and kept swearing, filling the chamber with angry obscenities which cursed me back in echoes. I screamed frustration and anger until my throat dried, and I could shout no more ... I'll die here.... Why bother trying?

I turned off the torch and sobbed quietly in the dark, feeling overwhelmed. I cried in bursts, and between them listened to the childlike sounds fade beneath me, then cried again.

It was cold when I awoke. I came up slowly from a long emptiness and wondered where I was. Sleep had taken me unawares, and I was startled. The cold had woken me. That was a good sign. It could as easily have taken me. I felt calm. It was going to end in the crevasse. Perhaps I had always known it would end this way. I felt pleased to be able to accept it calmly. All that sobbing and shouting had been too much. Acceptance seemed better. There was no trauma this way.

Source: Adapted from Joe Simpson, *Touching the Void*

Text 7

A sliver of sky must have hovered right above the vent, the indirect opening that let in air but no light. I sensed the presence of this sky, and filled it with words and images. I shifted the stars around, meddling with them to make room for a little of that light imprisoned in my breast. I felt that radiance. How can one feel light? When an inner brightness caressed my skin and warmed it, I knew that it was visiting me. I could not manage to make it stay. Instead, there was silence. It would fall suddenly on our blind eyes. It enveloped us, alighting like a calming hand upon our shoulders. Even when it was heavy, still laden with dust, it did me good. It never weighed on me. I should say that there were different kinds of silence.

The silence of night. It was a necessity for us.

The silence of the companion who was slowly leaving us.

The silence we observed as a sign of mourning.

The silence of blood circulating sluggishly.

The silence that told us where the scorpions were.

The silence of images we ran and reran through our minds.

The silence of the guards that expressed weariness and routine.

The silence of the shadow of memories burned to ashes.

The silence of a leaden sky from which almost no sign could reach us.

The silence of absence, the blinding absence of life.

The hardest, most unbearable silence was that of light. A powerful and manifold silence. There was the silence of the night, always the same, and then there were the silences of light. A long and endless absence.

Outside, not only over our pit but above all far away from it, there was life. You could not think too much about it, but I liked to imagine it so as not to die of forgetfulness. Imagine, and not remember. Life, the real one, not that dirty rag blowing across the ground, no, life in its exquisite beauty, I mean in its simplicity, its marvellous banality: a child smiling after tears; eyes blinking in too bright a light; a woman trying on a dress; a man asleep on the grass. A horse galloping across a plain. A man wearing many-colored wings attempting to fly. A tree bending down to shade a woman sitting on a stone. The sun drifts off, and you even see a rainbow. Life: it's being able to raise your arm, rub the back of your neck, stretch for the pure pleasure of it, get up and stroll along aimlessly, watch people go by, stop, read a newspaper—or simply stay sitting at your window because you have nothing to do and it's nice to do nothing.

I imagined that the clamor of life was a kaleidoscope of all colors, that it made noise as it breezed through the trees. This escape was not meant to last a long while. A little indulgence to prepare me for more demanding concentration.

Even dead, or more exactly, considered as such by my family, I had make the journey home. Without nostalgia. Without emotion.

Source: Extract, Tahar Ben Jelloun, *This Blinding Absence of Light*

Questions

1. What value is placed on stillness or silence in Texts 1 and 2? (*one paragraph*)
2. Compare the narrators' predicaments and responses to silence in Texts 3 and 4. (*two paragraphs*)
3. Compare the ways in which two of the authors use language and stylistic features to present their ideas. (*three or more paragraphs*)